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THE  
ETHICS OF NATURALISM



THE  
ETHICS OF NATURALISM

*A CRITICISM*

BY

W. R. SORLEY

KNIGHTBRIDGE PROFESSOR OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY  
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

SECOND EDITION, REVISED

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS  
EDINBURGH AND LONDON

MCMIV .





## P R E F A C E.

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THE chief purpose of this work is to arrive at an exact estimate of the ethical significance of the theory of evolution. The form in which this theory has impressed itself upon contemporary thought is mainly due to certain researches in biology; but its influence has not been restricted to the biological sciences. It has shed new light on psychology and on the sciences of society. In this way it has much to say concerning the development of morality. This also is within the scope of evolution. But at this point it is necessary to consider whether our interpretation of evolution may not have been too exclusively determined by observation of a limited group of facts. We must ask whether the factors of biological evolution are adequate to the explanation of moral development.

A still more important question than this is raised in the application of evolution to ethics. In strict-

ness, the theory of evolution is simply an explanation of an order of sequent facts or processes. It is purely historical. We might know all that there is to be known about the origin and growth of moral institutions and ideas, and yet be unable to distinguish between good and evil or to set up a standard for right conduct. And this is the fundamental problem of ethics. The question which it has to answer is not a question of history at all, but of worth or goodness. In attempting to deal with this question, evolution has been pressed into alliance with the more general theory which is now known as Naturalism. In alliance with Naturalism it professes to be a complete philosophy, and has made a special claim to have revolutionised ethics and set that science on a new basis. It has been my purpose, accordingly, to examine this claim, and to discuss the ethical bearings of Naturalism, both in its earlier forms, before evolution came to its aid, and in its later and more impressive developments. The book is called "a criticism"; but it is the criticism of a theory rather than of writers; and an effort has been made to overlook no aspect of the theory which may appear to have ethical significance.

The first edition of this book was published in 1885, and was founded on a course of Shaw Fellow-

ship Lectures given in the University of Edinburgh in the preceding year. The call for a new edition has led to a careful revision of the whole argument, as well as to the incorporation of references to recent literature. The chief changes and additions which have been made are the following: a more positive definition of Naturalism has been given in chapter i.; a great part of chapter iv. has been rewritten, chiefly on account of the fresh light thrown upon Shaftesbury's philosophy by the publication of his 'Philosophical Regimen' in 1900; chapter v. appears now for the first time; a section on the factors of moral development has been added to chapter vi.; a few pages on the psychology of pleasure and pain in chapter viii. have been rewritten; short discussions of some recent contributions to evolutionist ethics have been added to chapter ix.; and the concluding chapter has been rewritten and considerably shortened. Apart from these modifications, and from frequent minor changes in expression, the argument of the whole book remains unaltered both as a whole and in detail.

W. R. SORLEY.

CAMBRIDGE, *August* 1904.



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# THE ETHICS OF NATURALISM.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE ETHICAL PROBLEM.

EVERY great system of philosophy seeks to include within its scope an interpretation not merely of the course of the world, but also of the judgments and ideals of worth which accompany our contemplation of it, and direct our own share in its progress. No philosophical doctrine is complete which neglects the characteristic facts and conceptions of ethics. And, on the other hand, enquiries into the nature of goodness remain inadequate until brought into connexion with the general theory of reality. It is true that moralists have often attempted to do without metaphysics, or to keep their views on morality apart from their metaphysical theory. They have started with intuitions of right and wrong, or with the feelings of approbation and disapprobation, or with ideals of

1. Connexion of ethics with theological philosophy.

worth; and, in the analysis and application of the facts of the moral consciousness, the work of ethical science may have seemed to be completed. But the facts of the moral consciousness, or, moral experience, form a part of the wider experience which has to be interpreted by metaphysics: so that no final severance of ethical from metaphysical enquiry is possible.

(a) Depend-  
ence of  
ethical on  
general  
points of  
view:

Their close connexion is shown in the history of thought. The Naturalism or Idealism which marks a speculative system determines the character of its ethical doctrine, whilst moralists have been divided into schools by reason of their differences on such questions as the relation of pleasure to desire, or the nature of conscience, which are primarily questions of psychological analysis. And it is not special controversies only that are affected in this way. The scope of ethical science as a whole is differently conceived as the philosophical standpoint changes. Thus, not for one school only, but for a whole period in the history of reflexion, ethics was regarded as an enquiry into the highest good. Opposed schools agreed in looking from this point of view, however much they might differ from one another in defining the nature of that highest good. At other times, according to the prevailing view, to investigate and systematise the rules of conduct has exhausted the scope of ethics—controversies being carried on as

(a) teleolo-  
gical,

(β) jurat,

to the nature of those rules, and their source in external authority or in the internal revelation of conscience. Again, ethical enquiry has been apparently identified with the analysis and history of the moral affections and sentiments; while a purely descriptive point of view seems to be sometimes adopted, and ethics held to be an investigation of the motives and results of action, and of the forms, customary and institutional, in which those results find permanent expression. (γ) empirical:

These different ways of looking at the whole subject proceed from points of view whose effects are not confined to ethics, but may be followed out along other lines of investigation. They correspond to ideas which dominate different types of thought, and form different philosophical standpoints. The first starts from a teleological conception of human nature, as an organism consciously striving towards its end. The second assimilates ethics to a system of legal enactments, and is connected with the jural conceptions of theology and law. The two last are concerned to show that the subject-matter of ethics are facts which have to be treated by the ordinary inductive and historical methods. These different points of view, however, may be regarded as complementary rather than as conflicting, although their complete synthesis must be worked out in the region of general philosophy, and not on purely ethical to be connected by philosophy.

ground. Philosophy has thus to deal with the notions which determine the scope and character of ethical thought; and in this way it must be practical as well as speculative. If it is the business of philosophy to bring into rational order the material supplied by experience, cosmical and anthropological, it cannot be without bearing on the function of man as a source of action in the world. The question, What are the ends man ought to pursue? is not merely as natural as the question, What can a man know of the world and of himself? But the two questions are inseparably connected. To know man is to know him not only as a thinking but also as an active being; while to solve the problem of the ends of man implies knowledge both of his nature and of the sphere of his activity.

(b) Ethics  
necessary  
to complete  
philosophy.

Whatever may be the difficulty of connecting ethics with metaphysics, it remains true that the philosophy—whether metaphysical or not—in which our most comprehensive view of the world finds its reasoned expression, cannot neglect that aspect of things in which man is related to his surroundings as a source of action. Recent ethical literature is itself a proof of this fact. In its speculative developments, both realistic and idealistic, the philosophy of the present day has made the endeavour to connect its conceptions of the world of thought and nature with the ends con-

templated as to be realised in the realm of action. The conception of 'reality' is not the same as that of 'goodness' or 'worth'; 'is' does not imply 'ought to be.' But the connexion of the two conceptions has to be investigated not merely in order that human activity may be shown to be rational, but that reason itself may be justified by leaving nothing outside its sphere.

We must not, therefore, begin by drawing a line of absolute separation between the first two of the three questions in which, as Kant says,<sup>1</sup> all the interests of our reason centre. The 'What ought I to do?' of ethics is for ever falling back on the 'What can I know?' of metaphysics. The question of practice must be treated throughout in connexion with the question of knowledge. If we use Kant's distinction between speculative and practical reason, we must always bear in mind that it is the same reason which is in one reference speculative, in another practical.<sup>2</sup> We are not at liberty to assume with Butler<sup>3</sup> that "morality . . . must be somewhat plain and easy to be understood: it must appeal to what we call common-sense." Nor may we presuppose, as Hutcheson did,<sup>4</sup> that it is a subject "about which a little

<sup>1</sup> Werke, ed. Hartenstein (1867), iii. 532.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Kant, Werke, iv. 237.

<sup>3</sup> Sermons, v., towards the end.

<sup>4</sup> Essay on the Passions and Affections, p. iv.

reflection will discover the truth." The question must be looked upon not so much as one of immediate practical as of scientific interest, and reason is to be regarded as the only court of appeal.

2. The enquiry into the ethical end

The form just quoted, in which Kant states the problem, is not altogether free from ambiguity. 'What ought I to do?' may be taken to signify, What means should I adopt for the attainment of some end presupposed, perhaps unconsciously, as the end to be sought? But it is evident, not only that this is not what Kant himself meant by the question, but that, as thus put, it necessarily implies a further and deeper question. Not the discovery of the means, but the determination of the end itself—the end which cannot be interpreted as a mere means to some further end—is the fundamental question of ethics. It is only by misconception that this can be thought to be a trivial question. To say, as a recent scientific writer does,<sup>1</sup> "That happiness in one disguise or another is the end of human life is common ground for all the schools," is either to ignore what the schools have taught,<sup>2</sup> or else to use the word

(a) fundamental,

<sup>1</sup> W. H. Rolph, *Biologische Probleme, zugleich als Versuch zur Entwicklung einer rationellen Ethik*, 2nd ed., p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Not to mention Kant, the consistent opponent of every eudæmonistic principle, or the doctrines of a political idealist such as Mazzini (see *Life and Writings* (1867), iv. 223), reference may be made to W. K. Clifford, who looks from the scientific



'happiness' merely as another name for the highest good. But, even were it still the case, as it was in the time of Aristotle, that nearly all men were agreed as to the name of the highest good, and that the common people and the cultured alike called it happiness, the difference as to what they meant by the term would still remain. To say that the ethical end is happiness is, to use Locke's terminology, a "trifling proposition"; for in so doing we merely give it a name<sup>1</sup>—and one which the controversies of philosophy have surrounded with confusion. That the end is happiness in any definite sense, for example, as the greatest balance of pleasure over pain, *may* be perfectly true, but stands very much in need of proof. That happiness is the highest ethical end can be assumed as true only when 'happiness' is nothing more than an abbreviated expression for 'the highest ethical end.'

A difficulty of a more radical kind meets us, at the very outset of our enquiry, in the distinctively ethical notion expressed by the word 'ought.'<sup>(b)</sup> Various attempts have been made to surmount or circumvent this difficulty; and some of these will come under consideration in the sequel. The very

(b) implies a new point of view,

point of view, and yet holds that "happiness is not to be desired for its own sake."—Lectures and Essays (1879), ii. 121, 173.

<sup>1</sup> "Auch dieser Begriff [Glückseligkeit] ist an sich ein bloss formaler, der jede beliebige materiale Bestimmung zulässt."—Zeller, Ueber Begriff und Begründung der sittlichen Gesetze in Vorträge und Abhandlungen, iii. 209.

notion of conscious activity contains the idea of bringing about something which does not yet exist. It involves a purpose and selects the means for fulfilling that purpose. The notion 'ought,' it is true, means more than this: it implies an obligation to pursue a definite end or conform to definite rules, regarded generally as coming from an authoritative source. In this clear and full sense, 'oughtness' or duty is a comparatively recent notion, foreign to the classical period of Greek ethics. The force and definiteness belonging to the modern conception are due to the juridical aspect which the Stoic philosophy, Roman law, and Christian theology combined to impress upon morality. But even the notion of purpose or end implies a 'preference' of the end sought: the state to be realised is looked upon as 'better' or 'more to be desired' than the existing state. We may ask for the reason of this superior desirableness; but the answer must soon fall back upon the assertion of something held to be desirable in itself. The question which we are always asking, and cannot help asking, 'Why is such and such an end to be pursued by me?' or 'Why ought I to follow such and such a course of conduct?' must soon lead to the assertion of an ultimate end, an end whose worth or goodness does not depend upon any further result, but is intrinsic.

the transi-  
tion to which

This end, therefore, is not to be sought for some ulterior end, nor desired simply as a means to

satisfy some other desire. But it is still necessary to enquire into the way in which the end, held to be intrinsically good or worthy of attainment, stands related to the constitution of man and his environment. And the question to which I would draw attention, as the fundamental problem of ethics, is, What is that which men have variously called happiness, the highest good, the ethical end? and, in particular, How is the determination of this ethical end connected with the conceptions arrived at by theoretical philosophy? No assumption is made, at starting, as to the nature of this end, or the manner of arriving at it. It may be a transient state of feeling, or a permanent type of character; or it may by its very nature defy exact definition,—the idea itself being perfected as its realisation is progressively approached. In any case it requires to be brought into connexion with the ultimate conceptions about reality. requires investigation;

This question of the ethical end or of the good is thus fundamental in ethics, and with it all other ethical questions are related in such a way that they depend upon it for their full understanding. But it is easy to see that this question does not cover the whole field, and that the other points of view already referred to have a legitimate application. Ethics has not only to determine the end, but to apply it to practice, and so to decide as to what is right or wrong in particular actions,

and virtuous or vicious in character. And, in addition to the two questions thus implied—the question as to the ethical end, and that as to the application of it to practical affairs—there is another department of enquiry which has had a place assigned to it in most ethical systems, and which has a right to be regarded as belonging to ethics. We may investigate the place, in the individual and the community respectively, both of the sentiments and ideas and of the social institutions and customs through which morality is manifested; and this enquiry covers the twofold ground of what may be called moral psychology and moral sociology.

(c) distinct  
from other  
ethical  
questions :

Of these three questions, the first forms the subject of enquiry in the following pages. It seems to me that a great part of the obscurity which surrounds ethical argument is due to confounding these different questions. It is true that no one of them is without bearing on the others; but it is none the less necessary, in discussing any one of them, to keep its distinctness from those others well in view. In enquiring into the nature and grounds of the ethical end, I do not intend to develop a code of rules for practical conduct or a theory of human virtue; nor shall I attempt to trace the origin and nature of moral sentiments and ideas, or of the social institutions and customs connected with morality. If these subjects have to be introduced at

all, it will be only in so far as they may be thought to decide, or tend to decide, the question more immediately in view.

Thus it forms no part of the present enquiry to follow out the application to conduct of different ethical ends, or to exhibit the different practical systems to which different ends naturally lead. It might seem indeed, at first sight, as if the development of their practical consequences might solve the question as to the nature of the ends themselves. If we assume certain possible and *prima facie* reasonable ethical ends, and then see what codes of morality they will yield, surely (it may be thought) that one which affords the most consistent and harmonious code for the guidance of life will be the end to be sought in preference to all others. But, in order that the criticism of the 'methods' of ethics may be able to answer the question as to the end or principle of ethics, certain conditions would first have to be complied with. In the first place, it would be necessary that the ends or principles whose applications to conduct were to be examined should not be uncritically accepted from the fluctuating morality of common-sense nor from the commonplaces of the schools, but should be shown to be "alternatives between which the human mind" is "necessarily forced to choose when it attempts to frame a complete synthesis of prac-

(a) from enquiry into the methods of ethics.

Limitation of this enquiry

(aa) from necessity of investigating all logical alternatives,

tical maxims, and to act in a perfectly rational manner.”<sup>1</sup>

(bb) from  
more than  
one self-con-  
sistent code  
being  
possible,

Even where this requisite is complied with, it would still remain possible, in the second place, that two or more of the assumed principles might yield systems of practical rules perfectly self-consistent, and yet inconsistent with one another.<sup>2</sup> It would be very hard indeed to show that both the theory of Egoistic Hedonism, and what is generally called Utilitarianism, do not succeed in doing so: and thus the examination of methods is not of itself sufficient to settle the question of the end of conduct. And since—to quote Professor Sidgwick<sup>3</sup>—it is “a fundamental postulate of ethics that so far as two methods conflict, one or other of them must be modified or rejected,” it follows that the criticism of methods leads naturally up to an independent criticism of principles, unless indeed it can be shown that one method only yields a consistent code of practical rules.

(cc) from its  
assumption

Even in this case, however, if it led to the adoption of the end in question, it must be borne in

<sup>1</sup> Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, book i. chap. i. § 5, 3d ed., p. 11; 6th ed., p. 12 (where the word ‘rational’ is replaced by ‘consistent’).

<sup>2</sup> “The rule, ‘Let every one care for me,’ is quite as simple and, in a logical point of view, defines conduct as consistently and reasonably as the rule, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”—Sir Leslie Stephen, *Science of Ethics* (1882), p. 73.

<sup>3</sup> *Methods of Ethics*, I. i. 3, 6th ed., p. 6.

mind that the postulate would be implied that the true ethical end must be able to yield a consistent and harmonious system of rules for practical life. Without altogether denying this postulate, it yet seems to me that it stands in need of qualification. For in different circumstances, and at different stages of individual and social development, the application of the same ethical end may naturally produce different and conflicting courses of conduct. We must not start with any such assumption as that the rationality of the end consists in some sort of mathematical equality which ignores alike the different environments with which one age and another surround successive generations, and the different functions which one individual and another have to perform in the social whole. We must leave open the possibility that particular kinds of action which are right now may be wrong in another age; we must allow that everybody may not count for one, and that some people may count for more than one; we must admit that we may have sometimes to do to others what we would not that others should do to us. The only consistency we have a right to demand must leave room for such a variety of different conditions as to be, by itself, a very imperfect guide.

that the true end must give perfectly consistent rules.

From the difficulty of complying with the above conditions, it seems practically impossible for the criticism of ethical methods to decide the question

of the ethical end. Even if the application to conduct of every important end has been taken account of, we are met with the difficulty that two or more mutually antagonistic though self-consistent, practical codes may perhaps have been developed, while we are not even justified in assuming that inability to yield a system which will fit the complex circumstances of life in a perfectly harmonious manner is sufficient ground for rejecting an end shown in some other way to be reasonable.

( $\beta$ ) distinct  
from moral  
psychology  
and socio-  
logy.

The last department of ethics referred to—that which has to do with the origin and nature of moral sentiments and social customs—has a bearing on the question of the end of conduct in some respects more important than the investigation of ethical methods. For, whereas the latter expressly assumes certain ends as *prima facie* reasonable, the former enquiry, on the contrary, is frequently held to be able, without presupposing any ethical relations whatever, to trace the way in which, from primitive feelings and customs, morality itself has been evolved. The psychological side of ethical enquiry has always occupied an important place with English moralists. At times, indeed, the question of the ‘moral faculty’ has excited so much interest as to divert attention from the nature of morality itself. Moral truth has been supposed to be something known and indisputable, the only question being how we come to know it.



But the psychology of ethics, reinforced by the knowledge sociology gives of the development of morality, rises now to larger issues. It attempts to show the genesis of the moral from the non-moral, to account thus for the origin of ethical ideas, and even to determine what kinds of ends are to be striven after. In this way, a theory of the origin and growth of moral sentiments and institutions is made to render important help to more than one of the theories which will fall to be considered in the sequel.

The present enquiry is concerned with the way in which we may determine either the end of human conduct, or the criterion which distinguishes good from evil. But I do not propose to offer an exhaustive investigation of all the theories which have been or may be started in solution of the problem. On the contrary, I will begin by excluding from the enquiry all theories which proceed on the assumption that the moral code depends upon arbitrary law or convention:<sup>1</sup> not because I con-

3. Present  
enquiry  
limited

<sup>1</sup> The difference between Aristotle and Kant in ethics is sometimes expressed (see Trendelenburg, *Hist. Beiträge zur Phil.*, iii. 171 ff.) as if it consisted in the fact that the former investigated human nature in order to find its *τέλος*, whereas the latter sought the standard of action in a transcendental ground. There is reason for this distinction in Kant's manner of statement. But both may be regarded as investigating human nature. Their difference rather consists in the different position and function assigned to reason in man. It is because Kant is for the moment looking upon reason as something distinct from

to theories  
depending  
on the  
human con-  
stitution,

tend that all such theories are *prima facie* unreasonable, but because it is at any rate the more obvious course to seek to determine the function of an organism by studying its inner constitution, and its relation to the world of which it is a part. For this reason I shall not take into consideration the views of the basis of ethics which find it in positive law either divine or human. It is not necessary for me to deny that the source of all moral obligation may be the will of God, or the commands of the sovereign, or the opinion of society, and that the highest moral ideal may be obedience to such a rule. But theories of this kind make ethics merely an application of positive theology, or of legislation, or of social sentiment, and seem only to have an appropriate place when we have failed to find an independent basis for action.

The question which remains to be put may be expressed in these terms: Can we find in human nature (taken either alone or in connexion with its environment) any indications of the end of human conduct, or, in other words, of the principle on which human beings 'ought' to act? and if so, in

human nature that he says that "the ground of obligation is to be sought, not in the nature of man or in the circumstances in the world in which he is placed, but *à priori* simply in the notions of pure reason" (Werke, iv. 237). His "metaphysical" view of ethics, however, follows from the rational constitution of the human subject and his experience, and does not depend on any source that really "transcends" the reason of man.

what direction do these indications point, and what is their significance? The answer to this question will thus necessarily depend on the view we take of the constitution of man and his relation to his environment. And the special problem before us is the ethical consequences of one only of the two main views into which philosophical opinion, at present as in the past, is divided.

These two views may be designated Realism or Naturalism and Idealism or Spiritualism; and it is with the former alone that the present enquiry is concerned. In modern thought the theory now commonly called Naturalism may be said to occupy the position and to carry on the traditions of the theory of Materialism which, in its strict meaning, is no longer prominent in philosophical controversy. Naturalism, as the theory is held to-day, does not assert that material atoms and their motion constitute the sole reality. As regards ultimate reality it professes that it has nothing to say; it deals with phenomena only. But, in its interpretation both of the world and of man, it carries on the opposition to Idealism. The completest account of the world as a whole which is possible is held to be the description of it in physical terms: the spiritual factor in reality is held to be dependent, if not illusory. And the explanation given of man's life is similar. The psychology now associated with Naturalism is essentially the

and here to  
the ethics of  
Naturalism.

Meaning of  
Naturalism.

same as that which Democritus in the ancient world and Hobbes in the modern set forth as a suitable outwork of their materialistic theory of reality. Sensory impressions leave certain residua behind them called ideas; and these, as Hume put it, by "a kind of attraction, which in the mental world will be found to have as extraordinary effects as in the natural,"<sup>1</sup> are held to give rise to the whole content of consciousness. Naturalism is thus a psychological as well as a cosmological theory, and may be tested by its adequacy to explain the mind of man as well as by its competency as an account of the world. "As long as association of ideas (or sensory residua) is held to explain judgment and conscience, so long" (it has been said) "may naturalism stand."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Treatise of Human Nature, book i. part i. sect. iv., ed. Selby-Bigge, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Ward, art. "Naturalism," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10th ed., vol. xxxi. p. 88b. To this article reference may also be made for the history of the term. Its usage both in philosophy and in literature has undergone considerable modifications. The literary use is related to the philosophical, but not closely enough to require examination here, nor to justify the classification of the first edition of the present work under 'Schöne Literatur und Kunst' in a German book-catalogue. As a philosophical term 'naturalism' has been used for a theory such as Bruno's, in which God is identified with nature (cf. Adamson, *Development of Modern Philosophy*, ii. 44); but its earliest usage as a technical term seems to have had reference to the acceptance of a 'religion of nature' (cf. Lechler, *Engl. Deismus*, p. 31). It thus came to be used in the Deistic controversy as opposed to Supernaturalism, and in this way even to be identified with Rationalism. This

Into this theory of Naturalism, as well as into the corresponding but opposed theory of Idealism, the historical turn of thought which has characterised recent enquiry has introduced a profound modification. On the basis of Naturalism, we may either look upon man as an individual distinct from other individuals, as was done by Epicurus and Hobbes and the materialists of the eighteenth century, or we may consider the race as itself an organism, apart from which the individual is unintelligible, and look upon human nature as having become what it now is through a long process of interaction between organism and environment, in which social as well as psychical and physical factors have influenced the result. This is the view to the elaboration of which Comte and Darwin and Spencer have in different ways contri-

Naturalism,  
either indi-  
vidualistic

or historical.

usage survives in the term 'Natural Theology,' where 'natural' means 'rational' as opposed to 'revelational.' But the substantive 'naturalism' is no longer used as implying 'rationalism.' It means simply the theory explained above: that the description of the world in physical terms, and of mind in terms of sensation and association, is (not necessarily the ultimate truth but) the most adequate account of things of which human reason is capable. As the early usage of the term cited by Lechler is from an unpublished work, so also its earliest use as equivalent to materialism which I have seen is in a work of two hundred years ago only recently printed—The Philosophical Regimen of Shaftesbury (written between 1698 and 1712, and first published in 1900). In this work (p. 21) the author contrasts his own theory with that of the atomists, to whom he refers as persons "who count themselves naturalists."

buted.<sup>1</sup> What makes the historical method of importance philosophically, is not the mere fact that it traces a sequence of events in time, but the fact that, by doing so, it is able to look upon each link in the chain of events as necessarily connected with every other, and thus to regard as a system—or, rather, as an organism—what previous empirical theories had left without any principle of unity.

Idealism  
either indi-  
vidualistic

A similar movement of thought has introduced a like modification into the Idealist theory. According to older views (represented by the doctrine of 'innate ideas,' and by the ethical theory of Intuitionism), the individual reason is mysteriously charged with certain *à priori* principles which are to us laws of knowledge and of action; whereas the form of Idealism which is now in the ascendant resembles the theory of natural evolution in this, that as the latter finds the race more real than the individual, and the individual to exist only in the race, so the former looks upon the individual reason as but a finite manifestation of the universal reason, and attempts to show the principles or constitutive elements of this universal reason or consciousness in their logical or necessary connexion—leaving open to empirical investigation the way in which they

or universal-  
istic.

<sup>1</sup> Comte, by connecting ethics with biology; Darwin and Spencer, by the doctrine of evolution.

have gradually disclosed themselves in the individual human subject, and in the expression of the collective life of the race. Thus, as the Ethics of Naturalism is divided into an individualistic and an historical view, a similar distinction might be made in Idealist Ethics, though in this case it would be more difficult to follow out the distinction in detail; and many ethical systems cannot be said to have kept consistently either to one side of it or to the other.

In the following discussion I shall investigate the ethical theory which is founded on the basis of Naturalism—working out and criticising in somewhat greater detail that form of the theory which, from the agreement it lays claim to with the results of modern science, plays a leading part in contemporary philosophical thought, and exercises no inconsiderable influence upon the popular consciousness of morality.

# PART I.

## THE INDIVIDUALISTIC THEORY.

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### CHAPTER II.

#### EGOISM.

NATURALISM is a doctrine both of man and of the universe. And, before the theory of evolution had given a clue to the unity of life and the connexion of man with nature, its ethical doctrine was most commonly worked out in dependence upon an analysis of the impulses and activity of the individual man.

**Subjective  
Naturalism.**

This 'subjective naturalism,' as it has been called,<sup>1</sup> though it has been stated in various ways, tends to recognise but one kind of mental content—sensations and their mental residua or ideas, and but one principle of connexion—the laws of asso-

<sup>1</sup> Ward, *Ency. Brit.*, vol. xxxi. p. 88a.



ciation. On this theory the attempt has often been made to explain knowledge and rational principles; and conduct and moral principles are held to be explicable by the same method. According to it, sensation and the association of ideas must, in the long run, be adequate for the explanation of the moral consciousness. The function of reason and conscience in determining ends and directing conduct cannot be allowed any such independence as would compel the acceptance of a rational, idealist, or spiritual account of man.

Accordingly, if this theory is to work, reason or conscience cannot itself be regarded as giving the principle for directing conduct, or as determining its end. The end must therefore be sought either in the feelings of pleasure and pain which accompany both sensory and motor presentations,—perceptions, that is to say, and actions,—or in the more complex, or apparently more complex, emotions of the mind. And the latter may either be themselves reducible to feelings of pleasure or pain accompanying presentations directly pleasurable or painful, and thence transferred by association to other presentations, or they may be regarded as somehow motives to action which may be followed on their own account. The Individualistic Theory, therefore, is not necessarily hedonistic. It admits of a twofold view of the 'natural' man: one which

Psychologi-  
cal hedon-  
ism.

looks upon him as in essence a pleasure-seeking, pain-avoiding animal; another which regards him as having a variety of impulses, some of which are not directed to his own pleasure or avoidance of pain.

1. Its theory  
of action

The former view—psychological hedonism, as it is called—claims to be an exhaustive analysis of the motives of human conduct, perfectly general indeed, but yet valid for every case of action. It denies the possibility of a man acting from any other principle than desire of pleasure or aversion from pain. The theory is, that it is a psychological law that action is motivated by pleasure and pain, and that nothing else has motive-power over it. If, then, one pleasure (or avoidance of pain) is chosen in preference to another, it must be either by chance—an alternative which has no ethical significance, no significance, that is, for the guidance of voluntary conduct,—or because the one course promises, or seems to promise, the attainment of a greater balance of pleasure than the other, or is actually at the time more pleasant than that other. Thus the view that pleasure is the *only* motive of human action is really identical, for ethical purposes, with the theory loosely expressed in the law that action follows the *greatest* pleasure.<sup>1</sup> I say ‘loosely expressed’; for the law

ambiguous,

<sup>1</sup> Meaning by ‘greatest pleasure,’ greatest balance of pleasure over pain, and including the meaning ‘least pain.’ It is the ex-

as thus stated really admits of three quite different interpretations, not always distinguished with the precision which the subject requires. referring to

(*a*). In the first place, the law might mean that action always follows the course which, as a matter of fact, will in the long run bring the greatest balance of pleasure to the agent. It is evident that there is no ground in experience for maintaining this view. Yet it is a fair interpretation of the 'law' of psychological hedonism, as commonly stated; and it is at least an admissible supposition that this meaning of the phrase has not been without effect upon the uses to which the law has been put by some of its upholders. The second interpretation of the law—namely (*b*), that action is always in the direction which seems to the agent most likely to bring him the greatest balance of pleasure, whether it actually brings it or not—is the sense in which it appears to have been most commonly taken when expressed with any degree of accuracy. It is in this sense that—in language which ascribes greater consistency to men's conduct than it usually displays—'interest' is asserted by the author of the '*Système de la*

(*a*) actual consequences of action,

or (*b*) its expected consequences,

pression in terms of feeling of the statement sometimes preferred, that "action follows the line of least resistance"—a statement to which no exception can be taken, nor any importance allowed, till it be translated into definite psychological language.

nature' to be "the sole motive of human action."<sup>1</sup> The same view is adopted by Bentham;<sup>2</sup> and both James Mill and John Stuart Mill identify desire with pleasure, or an 'idea' of pleasure, in terms which are sufficiently sweeping, if not very carefully weighed;<sup>3</sup> while the will is said to follow desire, or only to pass out of its power when coming under the sway of habit.<sup>4</sup> Still another

<sup>1</sup> "Ainsi lorsque nous disons que *l'intérêt est l'unique mobile des actions humaines*, nous voulons indiquer par là que chaque homme travaille à sa manière à son propre bonheur, qu'il place dans quelque objet soit visible, soit caché, soit réel, soit imaginaire, et que tout le système de sa conduite tend à l'obtenir."—*Système de la nature* (1781), i. 268.

<sup>2</sup> "On the occasion of every act he exercises, every human being is led to pursue that line of conduct which, according to his view of the case taken by him at the moment, will be in the highest degree contributory to his own greatest happiness."—*Constitutional Code*, book i. § 2; *Works*, ix. 5. The continued existence of the species is, Bentham thinks, a conclusive proof of this proposition.

<sup>3</sup> Thus, according to James Mill, "the terms 'idea of pleasure' and 'desire' are but two names; the thing named, the state of consciousness is one and the same. The word Desire is commonly used to mark the idea of a pleasurable sensation when the future is associated with it."—*Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, J. S. Mill's edit., ii. 192; cf. *Fragment on Mackintosh* (1835), p. 389 f. To the same effect J. S. Mill says: "Desiring a thing and finding it pleasant, aversion to it and thinking of it as painful, are phenomena entirely inseparable, or rather two parts of the same phenomenon; in strictness of language, two different modes of naming the same psychological fact."—*Utilitarianism*, 7th ed., p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> "Will is the child of desire, and passes out of the dominion of its parent only to come under that of habit."—*Utilitarianism*, p. 60.

meaning may, however, be given to the 'law' of psychological hedonism, according to which the doubtful reference to the manifold pleasures and pains, contemplated as resulting from an action, is got rid of, and (c), the agent is asserted always to choose that action or forbearance which is actually most pleasant, or least painful, to him at the time—taking account, of course, of imaginative pleasures and pains, as well as of those which are immediately connected with the senses. It is in this interpretation of its law that psychological hedonism seems to be most capable of defence, and in this sense it has been more than once stated and defended.<sup>1</sup>

or (c) its  
present  
character-  
istics.

<sup>1</sup> Thus Jonathan Edwards says: "When I say that the Will is as the greatest apparent good, or (as I have explained it) that volition has always for its object the thing which appears most agreeable, it must be carefully observed, to avoid confusion and needless objection, that I speak of the *direct* and immediate object of the act of volition, and not some object to which the act of will has only an indirect and remote respect."—On the Freedom of the Will, part i. § 2; Works, i. 133. The matter is put still more clearly by the late Alfred Barratt: "Action does not always follow knowledge. Of course not: but the doctrine [Hedonism] does not require that it should; for it says, not that we follow what is our greatest possible pleasure, or what we know or 'think' to be so, but what at the moment of action is most desired."—Mind, vol. ii. 173; cf. Physical Ethics, p. 52 ff. So Sir L. Stephen, Science of Ethics, p. 47: "It is more accurate to say that my conduct is determined by the pleasantest judgment, than to say that it is determined by my judgment of what is pleasantest." The negative side of the same view was expressed by Locke in his doctrine that action

2. Ethical  
inferences  
from the  
theory,

The ethics of the form of Naturalism which is now under examination must be inferred from the 'law' that human action follows the greatest pleasure, in one or other of the above meanings which that law admits of. The law is the datum or premiss from which we are to advance to an ethical conclusion. The 'right' is to be evolved from the pleasurable; and the pleasurable, consequently, cannot be made to depend upon the right. It is certainly true of the conduct of most men, "that our prospect of pleasure resulting from any course of conduct may largely depend on our conception of it as right or otherwise."<sup>1</sup> But this presupposes that there is a right independent of one's own pleasure, and therefore does not apply to an ethics based on the simple theory of human nature put forward by psychological hedonism.

(a) in its first  
meaning.

It is scarcely necessary to discuss the first alternative (a), as no psychologist would seriously maintain it. A society composed of men constituted in the way it supposes men to be constituted, would be a collection of rational egoists, omniscient in all that concerned the results of action, and each adopting unerringly at every moment the course of conduct which would increase his own pleasure

is moved by the most pressing uneasiness (Essay, II. xxi. 29, 31), and distinguished by him from the former view (b), that the "greater visible good" is the motive (II. xxi. 35, 44).

<sup>1</sup> Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, 6th ed., p. 40.

the most. The conduct of any member of such a society could only be modified when—and would always be modified when—the modified conduct actually brought pleasurable results to the agent: never so as to make him prefer the public good to his own.

The second alternative (b) admits of such modification taking place only when it seems to the individual that this modified action will bring him a greater balance of pleasure or smaller balance of pain than any other course of action. Under this theory an individual might indeed prefer the public good or another man's good to his own, but only through his being deceived as to the actual results of his course of action. Ethics as determining an end for conduct is put out of court: though the statesman or the educator may modify the actions of others by providing appropriate motives. If the "two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure," "determine what we shall do," it is hardly necessary for them also "to point out what we ought to do."<sup>1</sup> The end is already given

(b) in its  
second  
meaning

<sup>1</sup> Bentham, *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, chap. i., Works, i. 1. With this statement may be compared the assertion of Helvétius: "Il semble que, dans l'univers moral comme dans l'univers physique, Dieu n'est mis qu'un seul principe dans tous ce qui a été. . . . Il semble qu'il ait dit pareillement à l'homme: . . . Je te mets sous la garde du plaisir et de la douleur: l'un et l'autre veilleront à tes pensées, à tes actions; engendreront tes passions, exciteront tes aversions, tes amitiés, tes tendresses, tes fureurs; allumeront tes désirs, tes craintes, tes

private  
ethics and  
legislation,

in the nature of action, though an enlightened understanding will teach men how the greatest balance of pleasure may be obtained. We can only get at a rule prescribing an end by changing our point of view from the individual to the state. It is best for the state that each individual should aim at the common happiness; but, when we talk of this as a moral duty for the individual, all we can mean is that the state will punish a breach of it. In the words of Helvétius,<sup>1</sup> "pain and pleasure are the bonds by which we can always unite personal interest to the interest of the nation. . . . The sciences of morals and legislation can be only deductions from this simple principle." According to Bentham's psychology, a man is necessitated by his mental and physical nature to pursue at every moment, not the greatest happiness of the greatest number, but what seems to him his own greatest happiness. And what the legislator has to do is, by judiciously imposed rewards and punishments, especially the latter, to make it for the greatest happiness of each to pursue the greatest happiness

*espérances, te dévoileront des vérités; te plongeront dans des erreurs; et après t'avoir fait enfanter mille systèmes absurdes et différens de morale et de législation, te decouvriront un jour les principes simples, au développement desquels est attaché l'ordre et le bonheur du monde moral.*"—*De l'esprit*, III. x, *Œuvres* (ed. of 1818), i. 293.

<sup>1</sup> *De l'homme*, concl. gén., *Œuvres*, ii. 608.



of all.<sup>1</sup> As distinguished from this 'art of legislation,' 'private ethics' consists only of prudential rules prescribing the best means to an end predetermined by nature as the only possible end of human action: it "teaches how each man may dispose himself to pursue the course most conducive to his own happiness."<sup>2</sup>

The consequences to the theory of action of the third alternative (c) are similar: it only states the law with more appearance of psychological accuracy. If a man always follows that course of action which will give him at the time the greatest (real and imaginative) satisfaction, it is impossible for us to infer from his nature an ethical law prescribing some other end, without admitting a fundamental contradiction in human nature; while to say that he ought to seek the end he always does and cannot help seeking, is unnecessary and even unmeaning. Modification of character may of course be still brought about, since the kinds of action in which an individual takes pleasure may be varied almost indefinitely. But the motive made use of in this educative process must be personal pleasure; and the end the legislator has

(c) in its  
third  
meaning.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Système de la nature*, i. 120: "La politique devrait être l'art de régler les passions des hommes et de les diriger vers le bien de la société."

<sup>2</sup> Bentham, *op. cit.*, chap. xix. (xvii. in the reprint of 1879), § 20; *Works*, i. 148.

in view in his work must be the same,<sup>1</sup> though it is often quietly assumed that for him personal pleasure has become identified with the wider interests of the community.

Result of  
this ambi-  
guity.

The different significations of which it admits show that the psychological law that action follows the greatest pleasure is by no means so clear as it may at first sight appear. Probably it is the very ambiguity of the law that has made it appear to provide a basis for an ethical system. When it is said that greatest pleasure is the moral end of action, this 'greatest pleasure' is looked upon as the greatest possible balance of pleasurable over painful states for the probable duration of life: on the egoistic theory, of the life of the individual; on the utilitarian theory, of the aggregate lives of all men or even of all sentient beings. But when it is said that the greatest pleasure is, as a matter of fact, always the motive of action, it is obvious that 'greatest pleasure' has changed its signification. For if the same meaning were kept to, not only would the psychological law as thus stated be openly at variance with facts, but its validity would render the moral precept unnecessary. It is even unmeaning to say that 'a man 'ought' to do that which he always does and cannot help doing.'<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, if the double meaning

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bentham, Works, ix. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Sidgwick, Methods of Ethics, I. iv. 1, 6th ed., p. 41; cf.

of the phrase had been clearly stated, we should at once have seen the hiatus in the proof of egoistic hedonism—the gap between the present (or apparent) pleasure for which one does act, and the greatest pleasure of a lifetime for which one ought to act—as well as the additional difficulty of passing from egoism to utilitarianism.<sup>3</sup> If greatest apparent pleasure—or greatest present pleasure—is by an inexorable law of human nature always sought, how can it be shown that we ought to sacrifice the apparent to the real—the present pleasure that is small to the greater future pleasure? If the individual necessarily pursues his own pleasure, how can we show that he ought to subordinate it to the pleasures of the ‘greatest number’?

It is a matter of fact, however, that the psychologists who maintain that action follows the greatest pleasure—meaning by that, greatest apparent or greatest present pleasure—have in their ethics made the transition to an enlightened Egoism, or even to Utilitarianism. The nature of the transition thus requires to be more clearly pointed out. If the former interpretation of the law of psychological hedonism could be accepted, and a man’s motive for action were always what seemed to him likely to bring him the greatest pleasure on

Ethical  
hedonism.

3. Transition  
from psycho-  
logical to  
ethical  
hedonism.  
Right action  
will imply

Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, p. 9: “To a being who is simply a result of natural forces, an injunction to conform to their laws is unmeaning.”

(a) correct  
estimate of  
conse-  
quences of  
action,

the whole, ethics—what Bentham calls ‘private ethics’—could be reduced (as Bentham finally reduces it) to certain maxims of prudence. To be fully acquainted with the sources of pleasure and pain, and to estimate them correctly, would imply possession of the highest (egoistic) morality. If men could be made to estimate rightly the constituents of their greatest pleasure, then right action on their part—that is to say, the pursuit of their greatest pleasure—would (according to Bentham’s psychology) follow as a matter of course. But conduct is not so purely an affair of the intellect as this would make it. Indeed, Bentham’s psychological assumption requires only to be plainly stated for its inconsistency with the facts of human action to become apparent. The “*video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*” expresses too common an experience to be so easily explained away. The impulses by which action is governed are not always in accordance with what the intellect decides to be best on a survey of the whole life and its varied chances. In judging the consequences of action, a future good is compared with a present, regardless of the mere difference of time by which they are separated. But the springs which move the will are often at variance with the decisions of the understanding ; and many men are unable to resist the strength of the impulse to act for the pleasure of the moment, though they foresee that a greater

(b) and cor-  
responding  
strength of  
feeling.

future satisfaction would follow from present self-denial.

It would seem, then, that the facts of experience are sufficient to show that a man's conduct does not always follow the course which he thinks likely to bring him the greatest pleasure on the whole. But the view that a man always acts for what is most pleasant—or least painful—at the time cannot be dismissed so easily. It is not enough simply to point to the facts of human action in order to show that this hypothesis is inconsistent with them. If we instanced the self-restraint in which many men pass their lives from day to day, it might perhaps be answered that there is a persistent idea of duty, or love of reputation, or fear of social stigma, the repression of which would be more painful than the restraint it puts upon other impulses. Even the martyr who deliberately parts with life itself for the sake of an ideal, may be said to choose death as the least painful course open to him at the time. It should be borne in mind, however, that the most thorough psychologist of Bentham's school—the late Professor Bain—refused to admit this line of defence for psychological hedonism, and held that, in actions such as those referred to, men are really carried out of the circle of their self-regarding desires.<sup>1</sup> But my present

<sup>1</sup> The Emotions and the Will, 3d and 4th eds., p. 296: "We must face the seeming paradox—that there are, in the human

purpose is not to discuss the merits of any such psychological theory, but rather to investigate its ethical consequences. And for this purpose the question requires to be put, how a passage is effected from psychological hedonism to an egoistic—and even to a utilitarian—theory of ethics.

The postulate that action can be rationalised

If a man always acts for his greatest present pleasure, real and imaginary, it seems a far step to say that he 'ought' to act—or in any way to expect that he will act—at each moment for the greatest sum of pleasure attainable in the probable duration of his life. But on reflexion, this may turn out to follow if we postulate that conduct can be rationalised. What is meant by this egoistic 'ought' may be said to be simply that to the eye of reason the pleasure of any one moment cannot be regarded as more valuable than the equal pleasure of any other moment, if it is equally certain; and that therefore to act as if it were is to act unreasonably. Man fails in acting up to reason

involves these conditions,

mind, motives that pull against our happiness. It will not do to say that *because* we act so and so, *therefore* our greatest happiness lies in that course. This begs the very question in dispute. The theory of disinterested action, in the only form that I can conceive it, supposes that the action of the will and the attainment of happiness do not square throughout. There is an exceptional corner, not very large in the mass of men, where motive and happiness come into conflict. When once we allow this, human action becomes intelligible; there needs no straining to account for the extreme instances of disinterested conduct, the greatest nobility of virtue."

in this sense, because his action is not motivated by reason, but directly by pleasure and pain; and not by a mere estimate of pleasure and pain, but by pleasure and pain themselves. The psychological hedonist must maintain that the estimates of future pleasure and pain only become motives by being not merely recognised (intellectually) but felt (emotionally)—that is, by themselves becoming pleasurable or painful. If the egoist calls any action irrational, it cannot be because the motive which produced it was not the greatest pleasure in consciousness at the time. It can only be on the ground that the greatest pleasure in consciousness at the time was likely to lead to a sacrifice of greater pleasure in the future; and this must be due either to intellectual misapprehension or to the imagined fruition of future pleasure not being strong enough to outweigh the pleasure which comes from a present stimulus, and to the imagined fruition of the more distant being weaker<sup>1</sup> than that of the less distant pleasure. It is owing to a defect of the imagination on a man's part that even with complete information he does not act 'up to his lights'—irrational action being partly a consequence of insufficient acquaintance with the normal results of conduct, partly due to defective imagination. Were a man's imagination of future

<sup>1</sup> And weaker in a greater degree than would be justified by the superior certainty of the nearer pleasure.

pleasure and pain as strong as his experience of present pleasure and pain, and did he correctly appreciate the results of his conduct, then his action would, of psychological necessity, harmonise with the precepts of egoistic hedonism.

Egoistic hedonism may therefore, in a certain sense, be said to be a 'reasonable' end of conduct on the theory of psychological hedonism ; it is the end which will be made his own by that ideally perfect man whose intellect can clearly see the issues of conduct, and whose imagination of the future causes of sensibility is so vivid that the pleasure or pain got from anticipating them is as great as if they were present, or only less lively in proportion as there is a risk of their not being realised. Conversely it would seem that only that man can act 'reasonably' in whom imagination of pleasure (or of pain) is already of equal strength with the actual experience of it. But, if the 'pleasures of the imagination' are as strong as those of actual fruition, the latter obviously become superfluous ; and it follows that the ideally perfect man is left without any motive to aim at the real thing, since he can obtain as much pleasure by imagining it. The cultured hedonist must, it would seem, be able to—

the latter of  
which

"Hold a fire in his hand  
By thinking on the frosty Caucasus,  
Or cloy the hungry edge of appetite  
By bare imagination of a feast"



So far as feeling or motive to action goes, no difference must exist for him between reality and imagination. And thus, although we may admit that, on this psychological basis, conduct when rationalised will agree with that prescribed by egoistic hedonism, yet it can only be rationalised by a development of the strength of the imagination, which would make the feeling which it brings with it as strong as that which accompanies a real object, and hence take away the motive for the pursuit of the latter. The discrepancy between representation and presentation, which is necessary for the state of desire, is no longer present. Hedonism vindicates its rationality only on conditions which imply the futility of action altogether. It is not merely that the attainment of the hedonistic end in practical conduct implies a strength of imagination of which no one is capable; but the conditions of acting both rationally and hedonistically, are conditions which would paralyse all activity.

is inconsistent with the nature of voluntary action.

The foregoing argument may perhaps be objected to on two grounds. On the one hand, it may be said that it ignores the vast complexity of human motive, and treats action as if it were a simple and abstract thing. On the other hand, we may be reminded of the fact that, while all men act for pleasure, the moral quality of their conduct does not depend on this fact, but on the *kind* of things in which they take pleasure.

4. Possible objections to preceding argument:

(a) complexity of motive; but it is psychological hedonism which ignores this:

So far as the former objection is concerned, it seems to me that the fault lies with the psychological theory of human action, the ethical consequences of which are under investigation. It is this theory which asserts that, however interwoven the threads of impulse, aversion, and habit may be, their most complex relations can be reduced to the formula, 'greatest pleasure, or least pain, prevails.' It is not necessary, indeed, that every action should be the conscious pursuit of a pleasurable object already before the mind in idea. But the theory, if consistently carried out, implies that the action which follows in the line of a previously formed habit, does so because the discomfort or pain of breaking through the habit would be sufficient to counterbalance any satisfaction that might result. The objection, therefore, of excessive simplicity or 'abstractness,' is one which cannot have greater force than when urged against the theory of psychological hedonism.

(b) difference in kind of pleasurable objects;

Further—and this is the second objection—the above analysis may be considered by some not to have taken sufficient account of the difference in the objects in which a human being can take pleasure, and of the fact that the moral quality of men differs, not according as they act for pleasure or not, but according to the kind of actions and sufferances in which they find pleasure. There can be no doubt of the importance of this distinc-

tion for questions of practical morals. The man in whom "selfishness takes the shape of benevolence," as it did in Bentham, is infinitely better than the man in whom it retains the form of selfishness. But the consideration is important just because it goes on the implied assumption that the hedonistic is not the chief aspect of conduct, and that there is a difference between courses of action more fundamental than the pleasurable or painful feeling attendant on them. If the principles on which the objection is founded were consistently adhered to and followed out, they would make not pleasure, but something else—that, namely, by which pleasures differ from one another in kind—the ethical standard.<sup>1</sup> But if, in ultimate analysis, it is the pleasure felt or expected that moves to action, it would seem that there is no way in which the conclusion of the preceding argument can be avoided. If pleasure is the motive, it must be *quâ* pleasure—that is to say, either the greatest apparent pleasure, or the greatest present pleasure, is the motive. If difference of quality be admitted, we are introducing a determining factor other than pleasure. Certain kinds of pleasure may be better than others for the race or for the state. But these differences must be reducible to terms of individual pleasure admitting of purely quantitative comparisons, before

but this involves a reference to something else than pleasure,

which psychological hedonism does not admit of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Kant, Kritik der praktischen Vernunft, Anal. i. § 3, Werke, v. 23, 24, Abbott's transl., pp. 109, 110.

they become motives to action.<sup>1</sup> From the point of view of the whole, we may say that one action leads to a greater sum of pleasure than another. But, in judging the action of individuals, all that we can say of it is, that to one man one class of actions gives pleasure, to another another: each man is equally following the course of action which either (*a*) will bring, or (*b*) seems to him likely to bring, the greatest pleasure, or (*c*) is actually most pleasant at the time. From the nature of the individual we can evolve no end beyond egoistic hedonism. And even this end can only be made his at each occurrence of action (assuming the first alternative (*a*) to be incorrect) by enlightening his intellect so that (*b*) will correspond with the actual greatest pleasure, or by also enlivening his imagination of future pleasures and pains so that (*c*) will correspond with it; and this, as has been shown, could only be effected under conditions which are inconsistent with the principles of human action.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. Grote, *Utilitarian Philosophy*, p. 20 note: "One kind of pleasure may be, systematically, to be preferred to another, but it must be because the pleasures classified under it generally exceed those under the other in intensity, or some other of the elements of value."

## CHAPTER III.

## THE TRANSITION TO UTILITARIANISM.

It still remains possible, of course, to fix an ethical end in some other way than by studying individual human nature. We may, for instance, looking from the point of view of the community, fix its greatest happiness, instead of his own, as the individual's end. But the difficulty then arises of persuading the individual—or, indeed, making it possible for him—to regard this impersonal goal as the end of his conduct. For this purpose, Bentham seemed to look to the exercise of administrative control which, by a system of rewards and punishments, will make the greatest happiness of the individual coincide so far as possible with that of the community.<sup>1</sup>

1. Different  
standpoints  
of individual  
and state

<sup>1</sup> Professor Bain distinguishes with greater clearness than his predecessors, first, legal duty, or that the contravention of which is punished by the ministers of the state; secondly, moral duty, enforced by the unofficial punishment of social disapprobation; and thirdly, the conduct which society leaves to individual choice, without censuring either its commission or omission. Moral duty is further distinguished by him from the meritorious, or conduct which society encourages by approval, without censuring its omission.

J. S. Mill, on the other hand, with his eyes turned to the subjective springs of action, saw in the gradual growth of sympathetic pleasures and pains the means by which an individual's desires would cease to conflict with those of his neighbours.

It is in some such way that the transition is made from Egoism to Utilitarianism. The transition is made: Bentham and his school are an evidence of the fact. But it is not therefore logical. It is, indeed, important to notice that we only pass from the one theory to the other by departing from our original individualistic point of view. Having already fixed an end for conduct regardless of the difference between the individual at the time of acting and at subsequent times, we proceed to take the much longer step of ignoring the difference between the agent and other individuals. The question is no longer, What is good or desirable for the person who is acting? but, What is best on the whole for all those whom his action may affect—that is to say, for the community?

cannot be  
logically  
connected

But while it is comparatively easy to see how this transition is effected as a matter of fact, it is difficult to establish any logical connexion between its different stages. If man's nature is correctly explained by the theory of psychological hedonism (which is necessarily egoistic), it is hard

to see how any considerations can be brought forward fitted to convince him that it is reasonable for him to seek the happiness of the community rather than his own. Only that conduct, it may seem, can be reasonable which directs and perfects the natural striving of each organism towards its own pleasure.

We may, of course, let our point of view shift from the individual to the social 'organism.' And in this case, if the 'natural' end of each human being is his own greatest pleasure, the end of the community, or organised body of pleasure-seekers, will naturally be concluded to be the greatest aggregate pleasure of its members. Thus, if we can hypostatise the community, and treat it as an individual with magnified but human wants and satisfactions, then, for this leviathan, the ethical end will correspond to what is called Utilitarianism or Universalistic Hedonism. But, when we remember that the community is made up of units distinct from one another in feeling and action, the difficulty arises of establishing it as the natural end, or as a reasonable end, for each of these units to strive after the greatest pleasure of all. For it is evident that the pursuit of the greatest aggregate pleasure may often interfere with the attainment by the individual of his own greatest pleasure. On the other hand, the self-seeking action of the individual may no doubt lead to a loss of pleasure on

through  
analogy of  
state to in-  
dividual.

Difference  
between  
one's own  
pleasure and  
the pleasure  
of others

the whole; but then it is not his own pleasure that is lost, only other people's. To the 'impartial spectator'—as to the community—it may seem irrational that a small increase in the pleasure of one unit should be allowed at the expense of a loss of greater pleasure on the part of other units. But it seems irrational only because the impartial spectator naturally puts himself in the place of the community; and neither takes account of the fact that to the individual agent there is a fundamental difference between his own pleasure and any one else's pleasure: for him the former is, and the latter is not, pleasure at all.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mr Gurney's attempt (Mind, O.S., vii. 349 ff.) to rationalise the utilitarian 'ought' depends upon the assumption that the individual feels a desire (not only for his own, but) for other people's pleasure (p. 352). From the point of view of the psychological hedonist, however, this desire is only secondary and derivative, depending upon the fact that it increases the pleasure of the subject. "Your pleasure," the psychological hedonist would say, "is desired by me *quâ* my pleasure." If, on the other hand, it is admitted that the individual has other ends than his own pleasure, there seems no ground in psychological fact for limiting these ends to something aimed at because pleasurable to others. From this point of view the first step in the establishment of an ethical theory would be an attempt to find a principle of unity in the various ends actually aimed at by individuals, and recognised by them as 'good.' This is made by Professor Sidgwick, who, after taking account of the view which regards cognition of truth, contemplation of beauty, free or virtuous action, as in some measure preferable alternatives to pleasure or happiness, maintains that "we can only justify to ourselves the importance that we attach to any of these objects by considering its conduciveness, in one way or another, to the happiness of



This fundamental difference seems to be overlooked when the attempt is made to argue logically from egoistic psychology (or even from egoistic ethics) to utilitarianism. Indeed, the hiatus in logical proof is often only concealed by a confusion of standpoints; and J. S. Mill, while emphasising the distinction between modern Utilitarianism and the older Epicureanism, has even allowed his official 'proof' of utilitarianism—such proof, that is, as he thinks the principle of Utility to be susceptible of—to rest on the ambiguity between individual and social happiness.<sup>1</sup>

overlooked  
in arguing  
from egoism  
to utilitarianism.

This ambiguity does not seem to have been consistently avoided even by Bentham. For the most part, indeed, nothing can exceed the clearness with which he recognises the twofold and possibly conflicting interests involved in almost every action. There is the interest of the agent, and the interest of others whom his action may affect. And he also holds that, in the case of divergence of interests, the individual will act for his own. "The happiness of the individuals," he says,<sup>2</sup> "of whom a community is composed,—that is, their pleasures

2. Connexion between egoism and utilitarianism according to Bentham :

sentient beings" (Methods of Ethics, 6th ed., p. 400). But Sidgwick's Utilitarianism depends on a Rational view of human nature which is beyond the scope of the present discussion. See below, p. 78.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Utilitarianism, especially pp. 53, 57.

<sup>2</sup> Principles of Morals and Legislation, chap. iii. § 1; Works, i. 14.

and their security,—is the end, and the sole end, which the legislator ought to have in view—the sole standard in conformity to which each individual ought, as far as depends upon the legislator, to be *made* to fashion his conduct. But whether it be this or anything else that is to be *done*, there is nothing by which a man can ultimately be *made* to do it, but either pain or pleasure”—that is, of course, his own pain or pleasure. Here, then, ethical Utilitarianism and psychological Egoism are both plainly involved. A man, it is said, can only pursue general happiness by its being identical with his own happiness. And as it is evident, and admitted, that these two happinesses often diverge in the courses of action naturally leading to them, a man can only be beneficent, rather than selfish, through some artificial arrangement which makes beneficence to be for his interest:<sup>1</sup> in plain language (since rewards are only of exceptional applicability), through his being punished for not being beneficent.<sup>2</sup> There is no ‘natural identity’ of interests; their ‘artificial identification’ can

<sup>1</sup> As Paley put it, with characteristic plainness of statement, “We can be obliged to nothing, but what we ourselves are to gain or lose something by.”—*Moral and Political Philosophy*, book ii. chap. ii.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Bain, *Emotions*, p. 264: “I consider that the proper meaning or import of these terms [Morality, Duty, Obligation, or Right] refers to the class of actions enforced by the sanction of *punishment*.”

only be brought about by the sanction of the law.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, as Bentham clearly shows, many cases of action cannot be safely touched by the legislator's art. Such cases "unmeet for punishment" include not only the actions which are beneficial or neutral in their results, but also actions hurtful to the community, though they may elude such vigilance as the state can contrive, or their restraint by punishment inflicted by the state may constitute a greater evil (that is, inconvenience), than the offence.<sup>2</sup> *Probity* may be exacted by the "persons stated and *certain*" who happen to be political superiors: except in rare instances, positive *beneficence* can not. Utilitarian conduct, therefore, is not a "political duty" because it is not fully enforced by definite punishment. The "art of legislation" is indeed said to teach "how a multitude of men, composing a community, may be disposed to pursue that course which upon the whole is the most conducive to the happiness of the whole community, by means of motives to be applied by the legislator."<sup>3</sup> But the means here indicated are such as cannot fully compass the

(c) Utilitarianism not a political duty,

<sup>1</sup> Compare the interesting discussion of the 'natural' and 'artificial' identification of interests in Halévy, *Formation du Radicalisme philosophique*, i. 13 ff., and elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup> Bentham, *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, chap. xix. (xvii.), § 9 ff.; *Works*, i. 144 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, § 20, p. 148.

attainment of the end. For the motives applied by the legislator either cannot reach a large part of the extra-regarding conduct of individuals, or could only reach it by entailing greater evils than those they would be used to prevent.

(b) nor a  
moral duty,

But if utilitarian conduct is not a political duty, it may be thought that it is at least a moral duty. Now a moral duty is said by Bentham<sup>1</sup> to be "created by a kind of motive which, from the *uncertainty* of the *persons* to apply it, and of the *species* and *degree* in which it will be applied, has hardly yet got the name of punishment: by various mortifications resulting from the ill-will of persons *uncertain* and *variable*,—the community in general; that is, such individuals of that community as he whose duty is in question shall happen to be connected with." In plain language, then, moral duty simply means the ill-will of a man's neighbours which follows his conduct in so far as that conduct affects them disagreeably. Such ill-will on the part of a man's neighbours may result from success or from failure on his part, from a breach of etiquette, from refusal to sacrifice to the caprice of those neighbours the wider good of the society whom his conducts affects (but to whom it may be

<sup>1</sup> Fragment on Government, chap. v.; Works, i. 293. Cf. Principles of Morals and Legislation, ch. iii. § 5, p. 14, where the Moral (or Popular) Sanction is said to proceed from "such *chance* persons in the community as the person in question may happen in the course of his life to have concerns with."

unknown), from deception or from telling the truth. In a word, the duty—that is, the punishment—is entirely uncertain: not only as regards the persons applying it, its nature and its amount, but also as regards the kind of actions to which it applies. They will be actions unpleasant to the people who inflict the punishment, but not necessarily hurtful to the common weal: since the immediate effects of an action are easily recognised, while its wider and more lasting consequences are not so apparent and do not appeal so surely to the interest of those who are cognisant of the action and immediately affected by it. Moral duty, therefore, as Bentham defines it, depending on, or rather being identical with, the ill-will of one's neighbours, is indefinite and limited in its nature, and can command or sanction no such definite and wide-reaching rule for conduct as the rule that a man should always seek the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people whom his action may affect.

Utilitarian conduct, therefore, is neither a political duty nor a moral duty; nor does Bentham follow Paley in insisting upon it as a religious duty “created by punishment; by punishment expected at the hands of a person *certain*—the Supreme Being.” And “if he persists in asserting it to be a duty—but without meaning it to be understood that it is on any one of these three accounts that he looks upon it as such—all

(c) nor insisted on as a religious duty,

he then asserts is his own internal *sentiment*; all he means then is that he feels himself *pleased* or *displeased* at the thoughts of the point of conduct in question, but without being able to tell *why*. In this case he should e'en say so; and not seek to give an undue influence to his own single suffrage, by delivering it in terms that purport to declare the voice either of God, or of the law, or of the people."<sup>1</sup>

This plain piece of advice which Bentham gives to Blackstone is not often neglected by himself. The motive, he once said, of his own exceptional devotion to the interests of the community was that it pleased him. "I am a selfish man," he wrote, "as selfish as any man can be. But in me, somehow or other, so it happens, selfishness has taken the shape of benevolence."<sup>2</sup> But when the matter is thus brought back from the regions of political, moral, and religious duty, to the individual ground of 'private ethics,' we have still to refer to Bentham's own discussion of the question, "What motives (independent of such as legislation and religion may chance to furnish) can one man have to consult the happiness of another?"<sup>3</sup> Bentham at once replies—and indeed the answer on his principles is obvious

(d) nor sufficiently  
motived in  
private  
ethics,

<sup>1</sup> Bentham, *Fragment on Government*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, xi. 95; cf. J. Grote, *Utilitarian Philosophy*, p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, ch. xix. (xvii.), § 7 ff.

enough—that there is no motive which always continues *adequate*. But yet there are, he says, “no occasions in which a man has not some motives for consulting the happiness of other men.” Such are ‘the purely - social motive of sympathy or benevolence,’ and ‘the semi-social motives of love of amity and love of reputation.’ A man is directly moved to promote the happiness of others through the sympathetic feelings which make the happiness of others in some degree pleasurable to himself; and he is indirectly moved to promote their happiness through his desire for their friendship and good opinion. So far, therefore, it is quite true that ‘private ethics’—or what Bentham regards as such—“concerns every member—that is, the happiness and the actions of every member of any community that can be proposed.”<sup>1</sup> It certainly concerns their happiness, but only in so far as this is a means to the happiness of the agent. So that when Bentham says that “there is no case in which a private man ought not to direct his own conduct to the production of his own happiness and of that of his fellow-creatures,” he should rather say that a man will<sup>2</sup> only direct his conduct to the happiness of his fellow-creatures

<sup>1</sup> *Loc. cit.*, § 8, p. 144.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Ought’ is inappropriate here according to Bentham’s principles, since there is no question of punishment inflicted by a political or social or religious superior.

which can  
be reduced  
to prudence.

in so far as such action leads to his own happiness. Private ethics, therefore, has to do with the happiness of others only so far as this reacts on the happiness of self; or, as Bentham ultimately defines it, in terms to which no exception can be taken: "Private ethics teaches how each man may dispose himself to pursue the course most conducive to his own happiness by means of such motives as offer of themselves."<sup>1</sup>

8. Ben-  
tham's treat-  
ment ex-  
haustive  
from his  
point of  
view.

Under Bentham's hands 'private ethics' is thus reduced to prudence, at the same time that the author has failed to show why the general happiness is to be aimed at by the individual as a religious or political or moral duty. Nor is this failure due to any lack of skill in following out the consequences which his premisses involved. The arguments used against him have thus an equally valid application to all who adopt the same general line of thought. For Bentham appears to have seen as clearly as any of his disciples the difficulty of bringing the egoistic basis of his theory of human nature into harmony with the universal reference required by his ethics. And the criticism already offered of the way in which Bentham attempts to bring about this connexion may be shown not to be restricted to his special way of putting the case.

<sup>1</sup> *Loc. cit.*, § 20, p. 148.



It is necessary to remember that throughout this chapter we are looking from the individual's point of view, and enquiring how far it is possible to work from it in the direction of utilitarianism. Now it is admitted that, in pursuing his own happiness, he is sometimes led, and may be led on the whole, to neglect the general happiness. A sufficient reason for following the latter—or an obligation to promote it—can therefore only come either from the supreme power or from one's fellow-men, and from the latter either as organised in the State, and expressing themselves by its constituted authorities, or else by the vaguer method of social praise and blame. Bentham's classification of the possible sources or kinds of duty into religious, political, and moral (or popular) is therefore a natural consequence of the individualistic system.

The first of these possible sources of duty is indeed only mentioned by Bentham, and then passed by. And yet it might seem that the religious sanction is a more efficient motive-power than the social, while it applies to regions of conduct which legal enactment cannot reach. Without question, the operation of such a motive is capable of bringing egoistic conduct into harmony with utilitarianism, or with any other principle of action to which the sanction may be attached. “Private happiness is our motive,

(a) The religious sanction,

relied on by  
Paley,

and the will of God our rule," says Paley;<sup>1</sup> and in this case such conduct will be obligatory as the rule may arbitrarily determine; while, whatever it may be, there will be a strong enough motive to follow it. The whole fabric of a moral philosophy such as Paley's, therefore, rests on two theological propositions — that God has ordained the general happiness as the rule of human conduct, and that He will punish in another life those who disregard that rule. The basis of morality is laid in a divine command enforced by a divine threat. Perhaps it will be generally agreed that Bentham acted wisely in not laying stress on this application of the 'religious sanction.' Even those least inclined to theological agnosticism would reject any such rough-and-ready solution of the problem which deals with the relation of morality to the divine nature. Paley's method of treatment, they would say, inverts the relation in which theism stands to morality. The divine will cannot be thus arbitrarily connected with the moral law. It can be conceived to approve and sanction such an object as the happiness of mankind only when God is first of all regarded as a moral being, and the happiness of mankind as an object of moral action. If any relation of consequence can be asserted between them, the general

inverts the  
relation be-  
tween ethics  
and the-  
ology.

<sup>1</sup> Moral and Political Philosophy, book ii. chap. iii.

happiness is to be regarded as a moral duty first, and only afterwards as a religious duty.

When he comes<sup>1</sup> to the political sanction, Bentham's treatment wants nothing in respect of fulness, and even those who do not agree with his estimate of the infelicitic character of many existing institutions and enactments will admit that even the best-intentioned legislator cannot make utilitarian conduct a political duty. We must bear in mind here, also, the effect which individual desires and opinions have not only on social judgments, but also on statute-law. In arguing on the relation of the individual to the State, we are too ready to forget that the State is represented by a legislator or body of legislators, and that we can never assume that in their case private interest has already become identified with the larger interests of the community.<sup>1</sup> For were this the case, the accusation of class-legislation or sinister interest would not be heard so often as it is.

A modern disciple of Bentham would thus be compelled, just as Bentham himself was, to make

(b) Limits of the political sanction.

(c) Uncertainty of the

<sup>1</sup> This is clearly recognised by Bentham: "The *actual* end [as distinguished from the right and proper end] of government is," he says, "in every political community, the greatest happiness of those, whether one or many, by whom the powers of government are exercised." — Constitutional Code, book i., Introd., § 2 Works, ix. 5.

social sanc-  
tion,

utilitarianism neither a political nor religious but a 'moral' duty, enforced by and founded on the shifting and uncertain punishments or sanctions of society—what Bain describes as "the unofficial expressions of disapprobation and the exclusion from social good offices."<sup>1</sup> But as a logical proof of utilitarianism, this means is, if possible, weaker than the preceding; for social opinion, though of somewhat wider applicability than legal enactment, has probably been, for the most part, in even less exact correspondence than it with the general happiness. The social sanction is strict on indifferent points of etiquette, does not consult the general interests of mankind on points of honour, and is lenient towards acts that the utilitarian moralist condemns.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Emotions and the Will, p. 264.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, p. 287. Professor Bain says (*Emotions*, p. 276 n.), "we ought to have a written code of public morality, or of the duties imposed by society, over and above what parliament imposes, and this should not be a loosely written moral treatise, but a strict enumeration of what society requires under pain of punishment by excommunication or otherwise,—the genuine offences that are not passed over." This would certainly be very desirable, were it not from the nature of the case impracticable. Popular judgment as to a man's conduct,—what society imposes,—is one of the things most difficult to predict: it is under the influence of most heterogeneous causes, personal, industrial, religious, political, &c. I do not think, for instance, that any one could safely undertake to describe exactly the kind of actions which will infallibly call forth the censure of British public opinion, or that of the smaller and intersecting groups into which society is divided.

Professor Bain, however, advances from the external disapprobation to an internal sanction—  
 looking upon conscience as one of the powers which inflicts punishment, and lies at the source of the feeling of obligation.<sup>1</sup> But, if conscience is only ‘an ideal resemblance of public authority, growing up in the same individual mind, and working to the same end,’ it can, as little as its archetype, point to the maxim of utilitarianism. According to Bain, it is through this sentiment—at first a mere imitation of external authority—that the individual becomes a law to himself, on recognising the utilities that led to the imposition of the law.<sup>2</sup> But on this theory, in so far as conscience continues to point to the conduct impressed upon it by its external pattern, it fails to correspond with the utilitarian maxim. If, on the other hand, it is modified by the comprehensive and unselfish view of the effects of conduct which utilitarianism demands, it must be at the expense of correcting its original edicts, and so far discrediting its authoritative claims.

(d) and of the internal sanction so far as a result of the social.

The ‘social sanction’ would be of much greater service if used to show how a solidarity is brought about between the interests and feelings of the

Value of the social sanction

<sup>1</sup> The ‘sympathetic’ sanction was also recognised by Bentham in his later writings; see Works, i. 14, iii. 290, vii. 116; cf. Stephen, *The English Utilitarians*, i. 245 n., and Halévy, *Formation du Radicalisme philosophique*, i. 284.

<sup>2</sup> *Emotions*, p. 288.

apart from  
logical proof  
of utilitarianism.

individual and those of his neighbours, from which the utilitarian maxim may be arrived at by a generalisation of his principle of conduct as modified by the social impulse. But this would not constitute a logical justification of utilitarianism: it would show how the principle has been arrived at, but it would not give a sufficient reason to the individual for adopting it. And this is really the tendency of much utilitarian discussion—of Bain's theory of conscience as a reflex of the external order, of George Grote's analysis of the moral sentiment, and of Mill's account of the progressive identification of the individual's feelings with those of his neighbours through the gradual increase of sympathetic pleasures and pains: for it was to this source that Mill looked for the practical solution of the antinomy between his psychological and ethical theories, though he himself tried to pass from one position to the other by means of the 'highway in the air' constructed by his own logic.

4. Mill's  
defence of  
utilitarianism:

Mill's attempt to pass by a logical method from psychological hedonism to utilitarianism is an instructive commentary on the difficulties which beset the transition. His work may be described as a vindication of the utilitarian morality, first, from the charge of sensualism; and secondly, from that of selfishness. And it is largely owing to his

polemic that utilitarianism is no longer looked upon as either a sensual or a selfish theory. It is not sensual, unless, indeed, the pleasures of most men are of a sensual kind. So far from being selfish, it is almost stoical in the subordination of individual desires it enjoins. But Mill wished to do more than clear the character of utilitarian ethics. He wished to show a logical reason for utilitarians pursuing elevated pleasures rather than base ones, and to demonstrate the connexion of his moral imperative with the principles laid down for human motives by the school to which he belonged. In both these respects his failure is conspicuous.

In the former endeavour, he went against Bentham by attempting to draw a distinction in kind amongst pleasures—a distinction not reducible to quantitative measurement. A higher degree of quality in the pleasure sought was to outweigh any difference in its amount or quantity. With this modification, utilitarianism is made to require a subordination of the lower or sensuous nature to the higher or intellectual nature. Pleasure, indeed, is still the end; but the 'higher' pleasure takes precedence over the 'lower,' irrespective of the amount of pleasant feeling that results. Pleasure is still the standard, but not the ultimate standard; for a further appeal has to be made to the criterion that distinguishes one pleasure from another, not

(a) distinction of kinds of pleasure

determined  
by author-  
ity,

as merely greater or less, but as higher or lower. As is well known, Mill did not look either to the action or to the feeling itself for this criterion. To have done so would have implied an acknowledgment that pleasure was no longer regarded as the ultimate standard. He found the criterion of superiority simply in the opinion people of experience have about the relative desirability of various sorts of pleasure. But such a criterion only pushes the final question of the standard one step farther back. Those people of experience to whom Mill refers—who have tried both kinds of pleasure, and prefer one of them<sup>1</sup>—can they give no reason for, no account of, their preference? If so, to trust them is to appeal to blind authority, and to relinquish anything like a science of ethics. But, if Mill's authorities can reflect on their feelings, as well as feel, they can only tell us one or other of two things. Either the so-called 'higher' pleasure is actually, as pleasure, so preferable to that called 'lower,' that the smallest amount of the one would be more pleasurable than the largest amount of the other; or else the higher is called higher, and is to be preferred to the lower—even although the latter may be greater as pleasure—because of a quality belonging to it

<sup>1</sup> I have spoken, for simplicity's sake, as if there were two kinds of pleasure easily distinguishable. But the question is really much more complicated.



over and above its character as pleasant feeling. The former verdict would be in the first place paradoxical, and, in the second place, would give up Mill's case, by reducing quality to a quantitative standard. Besides, it would be no valid ground of preference for men in general; since the pleasure of various actions and states differs according to the susceptibility of the subject. According to the latter verdict, the characteristic upon which the distinction of quality depends, and not pleasure itself, becomes the ethical standard.<sup>1</sup>

either can  
be reduced  
to difference  
of quantity,  
or leads to  
non-hedon-  
istic stan-  
dard:

In respect of his main contention, that utilitarianism is a theory of beneficence, and not of prudence or of selfishness, Mill emphasised even more strongly than Bentham had done the distinction between the egoism which seeks its own things, and the utilitarianism according to which everybody counts for one, and nobody for more than one. But, when he attempted to connect this doctrine logically with the psychological postulates of his school, he committed a double error. In the first place, he confused the purely psychological question of the motives that influence

(b) ambigu-  
ties in his  
proof of  
utilitarian-  
ism.

<sup>1</sup> Hence Mill's distinction of pleasure in quality has not been adopted by later utilitarians—*e.g.*, Sidgwick, Bain. The latter's "decided opinion is that he [Mill] ought to have resolved all the so-called nobler or higher pleasures into the single circumstance of including, with the agent's pleasure, the pleasure of others."—Bain's *J. S. Mill: a Criticism*, p. 113.

human conduct with the ethical question of the end to which conduct ought to be directed; and, in the second place, he disregarded the difference of end there may be for society as a collective whole, and for each member of the society individually. "There is in reality," he says,<sup>1</sup> "nothing desired except happiness"; and this psychological proposition is too hastily identified with the ethical principle that happiness alone is desirable, or what ought to be desired and pursued. Moreover, "no reason," he says, "can be given why the general happiness is desirable, except that each person, so far as he believes it to be attainable, desires his own happiness." And this admission, which seems as good as saying that no reason at all can be given why the individual should desire the general happiness, is only held to be a sufficient reason for it, though the assumption that what is good for all as an aggregate is good for each member of the aggregate: "that each person's happiness is a good to that person, and the general happiness, therefore, a good to the aggregate of all persons."<sup>2</sup>

Imperfect  
coherence  
of ethical  
and theo-  
retical phil-  
osophy.

It may appear strange to offer the preceding as the logical basis of an ethical principle which has had so wide and, on the whole, beneficial an influence as utilitarianism. The explanation is to be found in the want of full coherence which often

<sup>1</sup> Utilitarianism, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

exists, and is nowhere commoner than in English ethics, between an author's practical view of life and the foundation of psychology or metaphysics with which it is connected. It would certainly be wrong to imagine that Bentham's self-denying labours rested on a confusion of standpoints, or that Mill's moral enthusiasm had no other support than a logical quibble. To both of them, and to many others, utilitarianism was an ethical creed whose potent influence upon their lives was scarcely connected with any attempt to justify it logically. Such reasons in its favour as they adduced were rather after-thoughts for the defence of their creed than the foundations on which it was built.

The formula of utilitarianism cannot be expressed as the conclusion of a syllogism or of an inductive inference. It seems rather to have been arrived at by the production—or the recognition—of a sympathetic or 'altruistic' sentiment, which was made to yield a general principle for the guidance of conduct. This process involves two steps, which are consecutive and complementary, although the positions they connect are not necessarily related. The first step is to overcome the selfish principle of action in the individual; the second to generalise and obtain a principle for the non-selfish action that results. Mill seems to be the only recent writer who, in making this transition, adheres strictly to the psychological hedonism distinctive

5. Actual  
transition to  
utilitarian-  
ism :

of his school. He anticipates that the influence of education will so increase the feeling of unity between one man and his neighbours, that finally individual action will become merged in altruistic or social action. "The social state," he says, "is at once so natural, so necessary, and so habitual to man, that, except in some unusual circumstances, or by an effort of voluntary abstraction, he never conceives himself otherwise than as a member of a body."<sup>1</sup> This is perfectly true, but does not imply the suppression of selfishness. A man "never conceives himself otherwise than as a member of a body"; but it does not follow from this that he will subordinate his own interests to the interests of the other members when the two clash. In cases of conflict the individual often tends to sacrifice the good of his neighbours to his own good; and he may do so although he fully recognises the social consequences of action, and the necessity for him of the social order, just because he still remains at the ethical standpoint which treats private good as superior to public. It is true, as Mill contends, that, "in an improving state of the human mind, the influences are constantly on the increase, which tend to generate in each

<sup>1</sup> *Utilitarianism*, p. 46. But no statement of the sociality of man could be more explicit or satisfactory than that of Butler, *Sermons*, i. Cf. also Hume, *Human Nature*, II. ii. 5, ed. Selby-Bigge, p. 363.

individual a feeling of unity with all the rest; which feeling, if perfect, would make him never think of, or desire, any beneficial condition for himself, in the benefits of which they are not included.”<sup>1</sup> But this is not sufficient to connect the two antagonistic poles of Mill’s system. It starts with assuming the notion of an ‘improving state’ of the human mind, as determined according to an ethical standard not yet arrived at; and it gives no valid account of the means by which the improvement is to be brought about. It is prophetic of a time when the motives of human nature will have been so modified that the antagonism between self and others will be no longer felt; but it offers no practical solution of the antinomy suited to present circumstances.

The basis of the ethical sentiment by which the desires and actions of a man are to be brought into harmony with those of his fellows is investigated in a more thorough manner by Bain and by George Grote. But both these writers stand on a somewhat different platform from the strict psychological hedonism which Mill never relinquished. Thus Grote enumerates as “elementary tendencies of the mind,” which ethical sentiment presupposes, and out of which it is compounded, self-regarding tendencies, sympathetic tendencies, benevolent affections, malevolent affections, and (though in a

(a) recognition of Sympathy

<sup>1</sup> Utilitarianism, p. 48.

smaller degree) love and hatred of those who cause pleasure and pain to others;<sup>1</sup> and this without interpreting sympathy, in the way that Mill does, as having for its end the pleasures which come with the gratification of the sympathetic impulse, or the removal of the pain caused by its restraint. As Bain argues, this position of Mill's "is tenable only on the ground that the *omission* of a disinterested act that we are inclined to, would give us so much *pain* that it is on the whole for our comfort that we should make the requisite sacrifice. There is plausibility in this supposition." But "the doctrine breaks down when we try it upon extreme cases. . . . All that people usually suffer from stifling a generous impulse is too slight and transient to be placed against any important sacrifice."<sup>2</sup> In recognising sympathy as a 'purely disinterested' impulse,<sup>3</sup> Bain breaks loose at an important point from the psychology of Bentham. He is indeed only kept from a complete break with it by the position he ascribes to sympathy as outside of the ordinary sphere of voluntary action. Above all things, it would seem to be necessary that nothing should conflict with "our character as rational beings, which is to desire

as disinter-  
ested, by  
Bain,

<sup>1</sup> Fragments on Ethical Subjects (1876), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> The Emotions and the Will, p. 295.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 111; cf. Mind, O.S., viii. 55: "The important exceptions to the law of Pleasure and Pain are (1) Fixed Ideas, (2) Habits, and (3) Disinterested action for others."

everything exactly according to its pleasure-value.”<sup>1</sup> But sympathy obviously “clashes with the regular outgoings of the will in favour of our pleasures”: so that it ought to be placed outside voluntary action; and Bain has “always been disposed to regard sympathy as a remarkable and crowning instance of the Fixed Idea,”<sup>2</sup> although “it is a safer and more likely assumption that, in the operation of sympathy, there is a habit of sociability, engendered by long hereditary usage, of acting gregariously with our fellows.”<sup>3</sup>

It is owing to its exclusion from the normal operation of voluntary conduct that sympathetic appropriation of the feelings of others has little or no place assigned it by Bain, when he goes on<sup>4</sup> to describe the way in which the moral opinions of men have actually originated. They have, he holds, a twofold source—one arising from the necessity for public security, the other of sentimental origin. The former makes society ordain those acts and services required for its own preservation. The latter leads to the confusion of this necessary element in morality with the sentimental likes and dislikes which may be characteristic of different people. These are “mixed up in one code with the imperative duties that hold

without being applied to determine the ethical end,

<sup>1</sup> *Emotions*, p. 438.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>3</sup> *The Senses and the Intellect*, 4th ed., p. 362.

<sup>4</sup> *Emotions*, p. 271 ff.

society together"; and it is only when "we disentangle this complication, and refer each class of duties to their proper origin," that we can "obtain a clear insight into the foundations of morality."<sup>1</sup> Morality, therefore, is that which is imposed by society for its own preservation and security, and which is sanctioned by the punishments of society either in its "public judicial acts," or "by the unofficial expressions of disapprobation and the exclusion from social good offices."<sup>2</sup> Of this external law the moral sense or conscience is merely a subjective mirror or copy. The duty of unselfishness is not connected with the disinterested impulse of sympathy, but is traced to the external order of society, which has found it necessary to restrain the self-seeking action of individuals—a restraint which has come to be transferred to the consciences of the members of the society.

Bain's theory falls back in this way upon external authority, just as Bentham's did; and, for the same reasons, they are neither of them able to prescribe the utilitarian principle of conduct. But, in his assertion of the disinterested nature of sympathy, Bain has introduced—though he has not himself utilised—a fruitful principle, which may appear to give an adequate explanation of the moral sentiment, and to offer an escape from ethical as well as from psychological egoism.

<sup>1</sup> *Emotions*, p. 273.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.



This element of sympathy is most fully recognised in the instructive analysis of ethical sentiment <sup>and by Grote.</sup> by the late George Grote. At the same time, Grote does not, like Adam Smith, for instance, attempt to evolve the material characteristics of approbation and disapprobation from this source. The mere putting of one's self in the place of a spectator—or in that of the patient—instead of in that of the agent, is only a formal change, which will modify our judgments or feelings without accounting for their actual content. But a uniform formal element in all ethical sentiment is, according to Grote, a man's "constant habit of viewing and judging of circumstances around him," both from the point of view of the agent and from that of the patient.<sup>1</sup> This twofold position is occupied by every individual. He is an agent, and in that position his own interests and feelings are separate from, and often at variance with, those of others. But he is also a patient in respect of the actions of others, and in that position his interests and his feelings are commonly in unison with those of the majority. Hence a man is led constantly to adopt ideally the point of view which is not actually his own at the time, so that "the idea of the judgment which others will form becomes constantly and indissolubly associated with the idea of action in the mind of every agent." In every community certain actions

<sup>1</sup> Fragments on Ethical Subjects, p. 8 f.

are visited with the admiration, esteem, and protection of the society; certain other actions with the opposite feelings and results: so that there arises "an association in my mind of a certain line of conduct on the part both of myself and of any other individual agent, with a certain sentiment resulting from such conduct, and excited by it, in the minds of the general public around us. It is a sentiment of *regulated social reciprocity* as between the agent and the society amongst which he lives." And this sentiment, when enforced by a sanction, constitutes, in his view, the complete form of ethical sentiment.

As a complete explanation of the normal sentiments and judgments of men, this theory does not seem to be above criticism. It requires not only an association between every personal action and the feelings—sympathetically imagined by the agent—with which the action will be regarded by others, but it also implies that this association has become so inseparable that the feeling appears as an individual or personal one, distinguished by the subject from those other sentiments which he has when he deliberately imagines himself as in the position of others. But the view is referred to here as illustrating a point which we find in Mill, and, in a different way, in Bain: that the first real step towards the utilitarian standard is to make the individual pass somehow or other to a standpoint

outside his own nature. In Mill this is done mainly by the assertion of the social nature of man, in Grote by showing how a moral sentiment may be arrived at by the combined action of sympathy and association.

The further influence required in the transition to utilitarianism is the idea of equality. The best expression of utilitarian doctrine followed soon after the assertion of the equal rights of men which signalised the politics of the end of the eighteenth century in the French and American revolutions.<sup>1</sup> Bentham was affected by the spirit of this movement more than he knew, however far he might be from accepting its abstractions about natural rights. In his hands, too, utilitarianism was a political rather than an ethical doctrine. 'Everybody to count for one and nobody for more than one' is the rule for interpreting the phrase, 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number.' Without this assertion of the necessity of an equal distribution, there is no safeguard against sympathy being restricted and partial in its operation. Indeed the feeling of sympathy in itself is naturally strongest towards those with whom one is in most frequent relation, or connected by numerous associative ties; and, if left to itself, it might therefore be expected to give rise to the extended selfishness of class or family

(b) The idea  
of Equality

necessary to  
regulate  
sympathy;

<sup>1</sup> Although the formula had been stated by Hutcheson, Inquiry (1725), p. 164.

interest, only relieved by a spasmodic humanitarianism. This tendency is corrected by the dogma of human equality, which had been formulated as a juridical maxim in the Roman *Jus Gentium*, but afterwards passed into a political creed, and found vent in the literature of the eighteenth century and in the public events which marked its close.

The change which this notion of human equality passed through has been traced by Sir Henry Maine. "Where the Roman jurisconsult had written 'æquales sunt,' meaning exactly what he said, the modern civilian wrote 'all men are equal' in the sense of 'all men ought to be equal.' The peculiar Roman idea that natural law co-existed with civil law and gradually absorbed it, had evidently been lost sight of, or had become unintelligible, and the words that had at most conveyed a theory concerning the origin, composition, and development of human institutions, were beginning to express the sense of a great standing wrong suffered by mankind."<sup>1</sup> Now Bentham, however far he may have been from trusting to the system of 'natural law,'<sup>2</sup> was certainly not beyond the influence of the idea of human equality which it carried in its train; and, from his own point of view, he laboured to defend it. In assimilating

influence of  
the idea on  
Bentham.

<sup>1</sup> Ancient Law, 8th ed., p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> Principles of Morals and Legislation, chap. ii. § 14 n.

this idea, utilitarianism has preserved one of the best results of the old 'law of nature,' without the ambiguity with which it had formerly been used,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The ambiguity of the phrase is explained in an interesting way in Sir H. Maine's account of the change from its juridical to a political or ethical meaning. In some writers it seems to have a third and still different signification. We must thus distinguish (1) the juridical meaning, originating in the Roman "law common to all nations," which had arisen through the "constant *levelling* or removal of irregularities which went on wherever the praetorian system was applied to the cases of foreign litigants," modified subsequently by the Greek conception of *ισότης*. (2) The political meaning, that all men ought to be equal, arose from the preceding. But its notion of "ought" seems often to depend on an idea of the constitution of nature according to which all men are actually born equal—not only in rights, soon to be obscured by human convention, but also in power or faculty, afterwards unequally developed by education. Hence (3) the natural meaning. The doctrines of evolution and heredity have made this view seem as strange to us now as it would have done to the Romans from whom it was illegitimately derived. Yet at one time it seems to have been assumed, almost without question, that there is but little difference in the natural endowments of different men. This assumption lay at the basis of Hobbes's political theory—*Leviathan*, I. xiii. p. 60,—was stated in a more guarded form by Locke—*On Education*, § 1; *Works*, ed. of 1824, i. 6,—and adopted almost without qualification by Helvétius, who, carrying out Locke's metaphor of the soul as at birth a *tabula rasa*, afterwards written over with the pen of experience, says: "Quintilien, Locke, et moi, disons: L'inégalité des esprits est l'effet d'une cause connue, et cette cause est la différence de l'éducation"—the causes of the existing inequality being afterwards stated as twofold: first, the difference of environment, which may be called chance; and secondly, the difference of strength in the desire for instruction.—*De l'homme*, II. i., III. i., IV. xxii.; *Œuvres*, ii. 71, 91, 280. (Quintilian's statement, however, is even more guarded than Locke's. Cf. *Opera*, ed. Spalding, i. 47.) Similar expressions may be found in Adam

if in a sense which admits of a somewhat narrow and abstract interpretation.

It is true that this does not give exactly the result which is usually described as utilitarianism. I have spoken of the notion of equality as the regulator of sympathy—a canon in accordance with which the sympathetic impulse is to be guided. Sympathy impels us to relieve the pains and increase the pleasures of our fellow-men. The principle of equality dictates that this sympathetic activity is to be directed to the happiness of all men equally. Every one whom our conduct may be made to affect is to count as a unit, and a unit only. The distribution is not to be according to kinship of blood or social ties: though it is so much more in our power to promote the happiness of those closely connected with us, that it may fairly occupy a larger share of our thought and energy than the happiness of other people does. Utilitarianism carries the application of the principle of equality still farther, by looking upon self as a unit whose happiness is to be regarded as of exactly equal value with that of any one else. With every individual reduced to the same ethical worth, happiness is declared to be the end of moral action, and equality of distribution to be the rule for deciding between the claims of competing individuals.

Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, book i. chap. ii., and Godwin, *Political Justice*, book ii. chap. iii., 2d ed., i. 145 f.

It seems to me, accordingly, that utilitarianism is a theory compounded out of two quite different elements. On the one side the basis of the theory has been laid by Bentham and Mill in a naturalistic psychology which looks upon pleasure as the only object of desire. To this there is superadded the idea of equality, which is the distinctively ethical element in the theory. But it is only by confusion that the idea of equality—which Bentham expresses by the proposition that the happiness of one man is to count for no more than the happiness of another—can be supposed to be derived from the same theory of human nature as that which identifies pleasure and desire. Utilitarianism only becomes a practicable end for individual conduct when psychological hedonism has been given up. It is futile to say that one ought to pursue the greatest happiness of the greatest number, unless it is possible for the individual to act for something else than his own pleasure—that is, for an end which is for him not pleasure at all. In a word, utilitarianism, while maintaining that the only thing worth desiring is pleasure, must at the same time admit that pleasure is not the only object that can be or is desired: otherwise, it can never advance from the egoistic to the universalistic form.

6. The two sides of utilitarian theory not logically connected.

This view receives confirmation from the way in which the utilitarian doctrine was defended by

Professor Sidgwick. In the 'Methods of Ethics,' the tradition of Bentham is expressly united with the doctrines of Butler and Clarke. Professor Sidgwick agreed with Bentham, and the long line of moralists from Epicurus downwards, in maintaining the doctrine of ethical hedonism, that pleasure is the only thing ultimately desirable; but, with Butler, he rejected the psychological hedonism, according to which pleasure is the only object of desire. So far from these two positions being inconsistent, it is only through the second that the first can be held in its universalistic form. The problem is, however, how to unite them. In Professor Sidgwick's theory, they are connected by the application of the ethical maxims of benevolence and equity, which an exhaustive examination of ethical intuitions has left standing as axioms of the practical reason. Though utilitarianism, therefore, is still adhered to, it is on an expressly Rational ground, not on the basis of Naturalism.

7. Summary  
of ethical  
consequen-  
ces of psy-  
chological  
hedonism :

In this and the previous chapter, I have looked at human nature from the point of view of psychological hedonism, and have endeavoured to show what ethical principles that theory leads to, or is consistent with. The theory does not deny that there is a great diversity of capacities and interests in man. But it holds that, so far as concerns



conduct, they admit of being brought under one general law—that every action is subject to the rule of the ‘two sovereign masters, pleasure and pain.’ It is evident, therefore, that if ethics is to be connected at all with psychology—if what ought to be done is in any degree what can be done—the end of conduct must be hedonistic. The psychological fact cannot indeed be without more ado turned into a moral imperative. Yet this much may be admitted, that, if this interpretation of action leaves room for ethics at all, the end prescribed can be nothing else than pleasure, or the avoidance of pain.

The question, therefore, was how to determine the pleasure which is to be sought? And I have tried to show, in the present chapter, that utilitarianism does not admit of being logically arrived at from this point of view. It may indeed, under certain circumstances,<sup>1</sup> be the guide of political or social enactments; but these can only be made to bear upon the conduct of individuals by the sanctions which the State or Society has at its command. The individual can have as his maxim of conduct an end which corresponds with utilitarianism in two events only: when he is so

(a) no logical connexion with utilitarianism;

<sup>1</sup> That is, when (1) the legislature accurately expresses the average feeling of all the members of the State, or (2) the legislators happen to be fully intelligent people in whom ‘selfishness’ has taken the shape of benevolence.

constituted as to find his pleasure in the greatest aggregate pleasure of mankind, or when the political and social sanctions are so complete and searching as to make his individual interest and the collective interest coincide. The former event is, unfortunately, too rare to be taken into account in establishing a theory; the latter would imply an interference with individual liberty so impracticable that it is not contemplated even in the most comprehensive of socialistic schemes.

(b) admits  
of rational  
egoism

Hedonism in psychology, therefore, means egoism in ethics. But even this theory, as the previous chapter has shown, has its own difficulties to meet. The antagonism of individual and universal has not yet been got rid of. The difficulty is no longer caused by the conflict between one man and his neighbours: it is the difference between the feeling and action of a moment, and the sum of feelings and actions which makes up a lifetime. It is true that, if we admit that pleasure is the only thing worth pursuing, and that by 'pleasure' a man means 'his own pleasure,' there is so far no reason for preferring the pleasure of one moment to that of another, except as more certain or of greater amount or degree;<sup>1</sup> but this is to start with ascrib-

<sup>1</sup> Propinquity, also, was held by Bentham to be an independent ground of distinction and preference.—*Principles of Morals and Legislation*, chap. iv. sect. 2. The explanation of its presence in his list is probably the fact that Bentham's classification was derived from suggestions in Beccaria (*Dei Delitti e delle Pene*,

ing a value to pleasure, and not with the simple fact that pleasure is desired. If psychological hedonism is our starting-point—and we give to the theory the interpretation that has the greatest verisimilitude—it is the greatest present pleasure that rules. And, although the man of reflexion will no doubt attempt to estimate the future pleasure at its true value in comparison with the pleasure actually present, this can never have full effect upon his will. It has been shown, indeed, that the realisation of egoistic hedonism is not merely unattainable from the point of view of psychological hedonism, but that it would involve conditions inconsistent with the nature of desire.

only under  
impossible  
conditions.

1764). Beccaria, as a jurist, had to take account not of reasonable grounds of preference only, but of any conditions which affect conduct; and the degree of strength which 'propinquity' gives to a motive is not entirely due to the greater certainty entailed by that propinquity.—See *Mind*, April 1904, p. 270 f.

## CHAPTER IV.

## MORAL SENTIMENT.

1. A uniform theory such as psychological hedonism

PSYCHOLOGICAL hedonism possesses the merit of offering a simple and uniform theory of mental action. It may admit conflicting accounts of the kinds of action and sufferance which actually give men pleasure and pain,—a point on which, for example, Hobbes and J. S. Mill differ widely. But it has one general formula for the relation of feeling to action, which has been precise and clear enough to attract many psychologists. The ethical consequences of the theory have, indeed, turned out—if the argument of the preceding chapters is valid—to be neither so obvious nor so satisfactory as its adherents have commonly supposed. But it must nevertheless be admitted that, if psychology shows pleasure to be, as a matter of fact, the constant end of action, it will be useless—even if it is not impossible—for ethics to prescribe any other end.

The opponents of ethical hedonism have thus uniformly insisted that the theory which makes pleasure the end and motive of all conscious activity is imperfect; and this psychological question has been the battlefield of many of the controversies, at any rate, of English ethics. Psychological hedonism has not, however, been confronted by the English moralists with an opposed theory of equal simplicity, nor can the controversy be said to have led to a thorough analysis of action. The psychological investigation has, in most cases, been carried no farther than the ethical interests at stake seemed to require; and the predominance of these interests has perhaps prevented the enquiry from being carried out with complete freedom from preconception on either side.

not supplied  
by the op-  
ponents of  
ethical he-  
donism,

A uniform theory under which our various particular desires might be brought may, indeed, be said to have been suggested by Butler. He meets the hedonistic proposition that all desire is for personal pleasure, by the doctrine that no particular desire has pleasure as its end, since all pleasure presupposes a previous desire in the satisfaction of which it consists.<sup>1</sup> This theory, which may have been derived from Plato,<sup>2</sup> and was afterwards

<sup>1</sup> "The very idea of an interested pursuit necessarily presupposes particular passions or appetites; since the very idea of interest or happiness consists in this, that an appetite or affection enjoys its object."—Sermons, Pref. ; cf. Sermon xi.

<sup>2</sup> Phil., 31 ff. ; cf. Gorg., 495 f. ; Rep., ix. 585.

used by Schopenhauer to prove the negative nature of pleasure and consequent worthlessness of life, is, however, a generalisation which cannot be made to include all the facts which require to be taken into account.<sup>1</sup> Many pleasures occur independently of any precedent desire. And what Butler had to show—and was really concerned to show—was that desire was not exclusively directed to objects thus independently found to be pleasureable: the contradictory, that is to say, and not the contrary, of psychological hedonism.

in maintain-  
ing the re-  
ality of non-  
hedonistic  
activity.

For this purpose Butler pointed to the whole class of affections which, although they may also tend to private interest, have an immediate reference to the good of others; and, in addition to these, he contended for an original principle of benevolence towards others in human nature, as well as of self-love or care for one's own interests and happiness. This latter, he held, so far from being the sole principle of action, implied the existence of a number of particular passions and affections, directed immediately to external objects—the satisfaction of these desires giving pleasure, though pleasure was not the end at which they aimed. Voluntary action is thus not brought under any common rubric; for, at the same time that the calm principle of self-love is directed to the agent's greatest pleasure, the object of hunger, for

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, I. iv. 2, 6th ed., p. 44.

example, is said to be not pleasure but food, that of benevolence not personal pleasure but the good of others.

The attempt to give unity to the non-hedonistic view of desire has come from a different quarter. Uninfluenced by the exigencies of ethical controversy, which formed the entire motive of Butler's investigation, Herbart and his school have worked out a theory of desire, which has many points of similarity with that of Butler. However much they may differ from the English moralist—of whose existence they are mostly ignorant—they are at one with him in rejecting the maxim of psychological hedonism, *nihil appetimus nisi sub specie boni*; and their differences from him are largely due to their having gone further in their analysis of the facts, and endeavoured to bring them under a general principle.

Non-hedonistic action generalised by Herbart,

Butler's view of the object of desire is distinguished from the Herbartian chiefly in two respects. In the first place, he identifies that object with the external or real thing, whereas Herbart is careful to point out that it is a presentation or idea. In the second place, while Butler is content to postulate an original tendency of our nature towards certain objects, Herbart attempts to get behind this tendency, and explain the phenomena of striving from the interaction of presentations. Over and above the ordinary hypothesis of natural realism,

from the  
tendency of  
ideas to self-  
realisation.

Butler's theory implies a sort of pre-established harmony between our active tendencies and things outside the mind, in virtue of which some of these things do, while others do not, attract our desires. Herbart, on the other hand, attempts nothing less than a complete genetic account of mental phenomena, explaining the facts of presentation, desire, and feeling through "the persistence of presentations in consciousness and their rise into clearer consciousness."<sup>1</sup> The phenomena of desire and feeling are both accounted for by this mechanism of impelling and inhibiting forces.<sup>2</sup>

It would be beyond the scope of this essay to examine the above view of the active side of mental phenomena. For present purposes it is enough to draw attention to the fact that the common deduction of the phenomena of desire and will from the feelings of pleasure and pain is not the only 'scientific' theory of human action, and that it is rejected on its merits by writers who have no inclination towards what the psychological hedonist would call the mystical doctrine of free-will. It

<sup>1</sup> Herbart, *Psychologie als Wissenschaft*, § 104, Werke, vi. 74 ; cf. Waitz, *Lehrbuch der Psychologie als Naturwissenschaft*, § 40, p. 418 : "It is not difficult to recognise the basis of desire in the presentations brought forward by reproduction, and, at the same time, held back by an inhibition."

<sup>2</sup> With Herbart's doctrine may be compared H. Spencer's view of the genesis of feeling and voluntary action, *Principles of Psychology*, 2nd ed., part iv. chaps. viii. and ix.



is of interest to note, too, that Bain, in whose works the traditions of psychological hedonism find their most careful expression, has modified the doctrine so as to allow of desire of pleasure and avoidance of pain explaining less than had been formerly required of them. Outside the circle of hedonistically-determined motives, he recognises the influence of the presentation or idea as a self-realising element in the individual consciousness, apart from its pleasurable or painful characteristics.<sup>1</sup> These 'fixed ideas,' as Bain calls them, tend both to persist in the mind, and to project themselves into action, independently of pleasure and pain—or at least with a force which is out of proportion to the pleasure they bring. By means of this doctrine he was accustomed to explain "the great fact of our nature denominated sympathy, fellow-feeling, pity, compassion, disinterestedness";<sup>2</sup> although he latterly acknowledged the explanation to be insufficient, and admitted "a habit of sociability, engendered by long hereditary usage."<sup>3</sup> To the same category of fixed idea belongs (he held) "much of the ambition and the aspirations of human beings. . . . A certain notion—say of power, wealth, grandeur—has fixed itself in our mind and keeps a persistent hold there." It is

This tendency recognised in the doctrine of fixed ideas.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. note to James Mill's *Analysis*, ii. 383 f.

<sup>2</sup> *The Senses and the Intellect*, 3rd ed., p. 344; cf. *Mental and Moral Science*, pp. 90, 91. See above, p. 68 f.

<sup>3</sup> *The Senses and the Intellect*, 4th ed. (1894), p. 362.

asserted, indeed, that the action of such fixed ideas "perverts the regular operation of the will which would lead us to renounce whatever is hopeless or not worth the cost."<sup>1</sup> And, certainly, their admission among mental phenomena seems to imply the superposition of a new theory of action upon the old theory of psychological hedonism. There is no disguising the importance of the modification thus introduced. The name 'fixed idea' is misleading if it be taken to imply that persistency and tendency to action are properties belonging to a certain class of ideas only. Bain's doctrine is founded on the hypothesis of the identity of the nervous centres which function in representation and in sensation,<sup>2</sup> and might, therefore, be expected to hold of all representations or ideas. The characteristics of persistency, and of tendency to action, would, in this view, be normal characteristics of presentations, though they might belong in an unusual degree to some ideas from the relation these hold to the dominant cluster of ideas in the individual consciousness. And, if we thus attribute to all ideas without exception the tendency to self-realisation, and recognise—as we must—the relation of mutual assistance or inhibition which ideas bear to one another in virtue

<sup>1</sup> *The Senses and the Intellect*, 3rd ed., p. 344 f.; 4th ed., p. 362 f.

<sup>2</sup> For a criticism of this hypothesis, cf. J. Ward, *Mind*, N.S., iii. 510 ff.

of their being 'presented' to the same subject, we have granted the material out of which, in Herbart's skilful '*Mechanik des Geistes*,' the phenomena of feeling and desire are woven.

The view of individual human nature, which holds that not all its desires are directed to personal pleasure, thus claims consideration. With its less restricted theory of action, this doctrine may seem to offer a larger means of determining the appropriate end of human conduct. In particular, the suggestion naturally occurs that the ethical end will, on this theory, be something else than pleasure:<sup>1</sup> although there is no contradiction in holding that, while other objects than pleasure are actually desired, there is nothing else which can be held to be ultimately desirable, or the tendency to which can be said to have moral worth.

2. The non-hedonistic theory of action.

The ethical barrenness of psychological hedonism has been seen to result from its narrow and inflexible view of human nature. But theories such as those now to be considered have, in an ethical regard, to overcome a difficulty of another kind,

Difficulty of unifying the various impulses it implies,

<sup>1</sup> "If there be any principles or affections in the mind of man distinct from self-love, that the things those principles tend towards, or the objects of those affections are, each of them in themselves eligible to be pursued upon its own account, and to be rested in as an end, is implied in the very idea of such principle or affection."—Butler, *Sermons*, Pref.

arising from the variety of impulses which they recognise. The objects to which these impulses or desires relate have as yet received no further characterisation than that they are objects of desire. And the difficulty of finding a principle by which some order of precedence or worth amongst them may be determined is just, in other words, the difficulty of obtaining a moral standard.

The question does not ordinarily arise in the above form, because the moral standard is commonly taken for granted, and the various impulses, affections, and dispositions are made to derive their ethical rank from their relation to that standard. But this method is obviously inappropriate when the standard is still to be ascertained. And it may be thought that the constitution of man contains in itself a means of distinguishing the moral value of its various elements, or of the actions to which they lead, and thus furnishing a moral standard or end for conduct. This purpose seems to have been to some extent, though not quite clearly, kept in view by the writers who, in the eighteenth century, contended against the selfish theory of action which had been set forth by Hobbes. They attempted to show that selfishness was not the only, nor even the most prominent, principle of action; and, from the system of diverse principles which they found implanted in human nature, they endeavoured to work out a theory of conduct.

so as to determine a standard for action.

The leader of this school of thought was Shaftesbury, the pupil and friend of Locke. Ten years after the first printing of his most important ethical treatise, the 'Inquiry concerning Virtue and Merit,' we find him telling a correspondent that he is making him "the greatest confidence in the world, which is that of my philosophy, even against my old tutor and governor, whose name is so established in the world, but with whom I ever concealed my differences as much as possible. For as ill a builder as he is, and as little able to treat the home-points of philosophy, he is of admirable use against the rubbish of the schools in which most of us have been bred up."<sup>1</sup> In the 'Inquiry,' Shaftesbury worked out an ethical doctrine radically distinct from that of Locke; but (as the above passage suggests) the full extent of the difference of his speculative point of view is not brought out in that work. It is most clearly shown in the reflexions set down for his own use, which have been recently published under the title of 'Philosophical Regimen.' Virtue, he holds, is natural, and consists in living according to nature; but 'nature' is not for him what it is for the 'naturalists': it is the "order and appointment of supreme reason;"<sup>2</sup> and according to this supreme reason

This attempted by Shaftesbury and his followers.

Shaftesbury's 'rational' view of nature.

<sup>1</sup> Life, Letters, and Philosophical Regimen of Shaftesbury, ed. Rand (1900), p. 416.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 6, 50.

everything happens; "nothing is supernumerary or unnecessary": "the whole is harmony, the numbers entire, the music perfect."<sup>1</sup>

Natural  
affection.

"Natural affection," according to Shaftesbury, "is to affect according to nature or the design and will of nature." In every creature, therefore, it tends to the good of the species or kind. The mind of man has a still further reach; and "a creature who is in that higher degree rational, and can consider the good of the whole, must withal consider himself as under an obligation to the interest and good of the whole, preferably to the interest of his private species: and this is the ground of a new and superior affection. . . . I must in a certain manner be reconciled to all things, love all things, and absolutely hate or abhor nothing whatsoever that has being in the world. . . . This is the *natural affection* of a rational creature, capable of knowing nature and of considering the good and interest of the whole."<sup>2</sup>

This high acquiescence in the universal reason of things inspires Shaftesbury's ethical doctrine; but it has not full scope given to it in the 'Inquiry.' There he has the special object in view of marking off from one another the spheres of religion and virtue; and, while he holds that "the perfection and height of virtue must be owing to the belief of

<sup>1</sup> Philosophical Regimen, pp. 31, 35.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 3, 6.

a God,"<sup>1</sup> he is concerned to show the independence of morality: "there is no speculative opinion, persuasion, or belief, which is capable immediately or directly to exclude or destroy it"; for "sense of right and wrong" is "as natural to us as natural affection itself," and is "a first principle in our constitution and make."<sup>2</sup>

There are thus two principles inherent in the nature of man upon which ethics must be based. One of these is what Shaftesbury calls "natural affection"; the other is the "sense of right and wrong" to which he gave the name of "moral sense."<sup>3</sup> And, as the basis of ethics is to be independent of religion and of any "speculative opinion," his own speculative conviction of the purpose and perfection of the universe would seem to be excluded at the outset; so that appeal cannot be made to that higher degree of natural affection which brings a man "under an obligation to the interest and good of the whole" as well as and "preferably to the interest of his private species." Natural affections are, therefore, in the 'Inquiry,' defined simply as those "which lead to the good of the public," as distinguished from the Self-affections "which lead only to the good of the

<sup>1</sup> Inquiry, I. iii. 3 (Characteristics, 5th ed., vol. ii. p. 76).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., I. iii. 2 (vol. ii. p. 44).

<sup>3</sup> The term is used several times in the marginal analysis, but not in the text, of the 'Inquiry.'

private," and from the Unnatural affections which lead to no good whatever.<sup>1</sup>

With his speculative conception of the whole left out of sight, it is difficult for Shaftesbury to carry out consistently his teleological point of view. Man and his affections are, after all, but a part of a larger whole; and, as Butler says, "we cannot have a thorough knowledge of any part without knowing the whole."<sup>2</sup> How, then, is it possible to show that man, with these different affections, yet constitutes a harmonious system? The field has been restricted to human nature, and the admission of 'unnatural' affections therein seems of itself an insuperable difficulty in the proof of internal harmony; while the possible divergence of the private and public systems calls for some method of reconciliation.

The social and private systems: attempts at harmonising them.

Without an appeal to the universal design of things, it is necessary to study the two systems themselves and show that they are really harmonious. There is thus a constant tendency in Shaftesbury, and still more in his successors, Hutcheson and Butler, to revert to empirical arguments in order to demonstrate the harmony of virtue and interest, and to prove to the individual that his own happiness consists in the exercise of the social affections. Thus Shaftesbury tries to show, by an

<sup>1</sup> Inquiry, II. i. 3, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> Sermons xv.; Works, ed. of 1850, ii. 193.



elaborate review of the facts, that to have the "natural" (or social) affections too weak, or the private affections too strong, is a source of misery,<sup>1</sup> as well as the chief source of vice;<sup>2</sup> and that, largely owing to the pleasure of virtuous action, it is "to the private interest and good of every one to work to the general good."<sup>3</sup> Hutcheson, again, devotes a large portion of his most mature work to allay the suspicion "that in following the impulse of our kind affections and the moral faculty, we are counteracting our interests and abandoning what may be of more consequence to our happiness than either this self-approbation or the applause of others."<sup>4</sup> And Butler, referring to virtuous conduct, says in a well-known passage, that "when we sit down in a cool hour, we can neither justify to ourselves this or any other pursuit, till we are convinced that it will be for our happiness, or at least not contrary to it."<sup>5</sup> Opposed as he was to the selfish theory of human action, he was unable to think of any sacrifice of private happiness as a thing to be looked for, or in any way taken into account, in conduct which is the result of calm deliberation. It is therefore not difficult to understand the judgment of Schleiermacher that "the

<sup>1</sup> Inquiry, II. ii. 1, 2; cf. pp. 99, 126, 139.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., II. i. 3, p. 97.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., II. ii. concl., p. 175.

<sup>4</sup> System of Moral Philosophy, i. 99.

<sup>5</sup> Sermons, xi.; Works, ii. 145.

English school of Shaftesbury, with all their talk about virtue, are really given up to pleasure.”<sup>1</sup>

But the criticism is one-sided; for it neglects the teleological conception with which Shaftesbury started, and which he strove to carry through. His difficulty was to systematise the various impulses which make up the nature of man. The conflict of impulses was too obvious a fact not to be acknowledged even in his optimistic philosophy. He recognised, as we have seen, not only private or self-affections, promoting the good of the individual, and ‘natural’ or social affections which led to the public good, but also ‘unnatural’ affections, which tended to no good whatever. The impulses are systematised, but into different systems. The last class of affections is condemned outright, because its results are contrary both to public and to private welfare; while an attempt is made to prove from experience the coincidence in conduct of the two other systems public and private. What Shaftesbury had in view was a real organic union between the individual and society; but, when he came to establish its nature, he made it consist in an asserted harmony of interests. In order to show the “obligation there is to virtue,” he “cast up all these particulars, from whence (as by way of addition and subtraction) the main sum or general account of happiness is either augmented or dimin-

The empirical argument.

<sup>1</sup> Kritik der bisherigen Sittenlehre (1803), p. 54.

ished," and arrived at the conclusion that "to be wicked or vicious is to be miserable or unhappy."<sup>1</sup> He often spoke of virtue as identical with the harmony or 'balance' of the affections of the individual man; but he expressly defined it as consisting in the individual "having all his inclinations and affections . . . agreeing with the good of his kind or of that system in which he is included, and of which he constitutes a part."<sup>2</sup> And the two views require to be connected by a proof that the harmonious development of an individual's affections will lead to the good of the species: while this proof depends on a summation of consequences which is not free from one-sidedness.

Shaftesbury does indeed contend that both the self-affections and the "natural" or social affections become self-destructive when carried to excess, or so as to interfere with one another.<sup>3</sup> But he is unable to establish this position; he cannot show that the contradiction in the conception of a completely solitary being belongs also to the conception of a judiciously selfish being, whose affection for other men, and whose devotion to causes or institutions, are regulated by a due regard to the relation in which they stand to his own interests. This possibility is not altogether overlooked by

<sup>1</sup> Inquiry, II. ii. pp. 77, 172, 173.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., II. i. 1, p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Ibid., II. i. 3, p. 87.

Shaftesbury himself. For he institutes a somewhat elaborate comparison between what he calls Entire and Partial affection. The former takes in all mankind, and indeed the whole system of things; in it the 'life according to nature' is fully realised. On the other hand, it is argued "that partial affection, or social love in part, without regard to a complete society or whole, is in itself an inconsistency, and implies an absolute contradiction." Such affection is capricious, and, having "no foundation or establishment in reason, so it must be easily removable, and subject to alteration, without reason"; as it gives but "a short and slender enjoyment" of the pleasures of sympathy, "so neither is it able to derive any considerable enjoyment from that other principal branch of human happiness—namely, consciousness of the actual or merited esteem of others"; it is even "impossible that they who esteem or love by any other rule than that of virtue should place their affection on such subjects as they can long esteem or love"; finally, the easy temper and quiet mind on which pleasure largely depends "must of necessity be owing to the natural and good affections."<sup>1</sup>

The controversy, be it noted, is not whether selfishness, untempered by the social affections, can be a guide to happiness. The question is whether it is possible for a man so to direct his social

<sup>1</sup> Inquiry, II. ii. 1, p. 110 ff.

affections that he may enjoy the pleasures of human intercourse, with the love and esteem of others, while avoiding the sacrifices which may be entailed by complete devotion to the common good. Perhaps the question hardly admits of a quite conclusive answer; for the temper of mind which is most susceptible to social pleasures is apt to be most affected by social pains; and yet this risk may perhaps be largely diminished by following the worldly advice to choose one's friends prudently, and to interest oneself in causes which give good promise of success. The mental attitude of estimating each experience as it comes by its bearing on selfish interests is indeed fatal to the pure sympathetic enjoyments; but prudence in the selection of friends and pursuits does not necessarily entail the same attitude of mind or the same results. And the contention cannot be established that there is anything peculiarly capricious or unstable in affection to some rather than to others. It is a paradox to say with Shaftesbury that this cannot be real without affection to mankind as a system. When the latter exists at all, it has commonly grown out of the former; and, when it has not arisen in this way, it is apt to be a thin intellectual conceit. If evidence were wanted of the reality of the 'partial' affections, independently of this cosmopolitan or cosmic sentiment, reference might be made to a philosopher of a succeeding

generation, whose temper (in the judgment of the friend who knew him best) "seemed to be more happily balanced than that perhaps of any other man I have ever known," and who approached "as nearly to the idea of a perfectly wise and virtuous man as perhaps the nature of human frailty will admit." If this estimate is true—and it does not stand alone—David Hume was certainly not devoid of 'natural' affection; and yet, so far from feeling or expressing any 'entire' affection towards the species as a whole, he "affirmed that there is no such passion in human minds as the love of mankind, merely as such, independent of personal qualities, of services, or of relation to ourself."<sup>1</sup> And a similar view was expressed by a writer nearer our own day, whose sympathies, like his antipathies, were never imperfect: "Humanity," he said, "is only I writ large, and love for Humanity generally means zeal for MY notions as to what men should be and how they should live. It frequently means distaste for the present. He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen is peculiarly apt to suppose that he loves his distant cousin whom he hath not seen, and never will see."<sup>2</sup>

Incomplete  
harmony of

Shaftesbury's analysis of human nature thus fails to establish his view of its final purpose.

<sup>1</sup> Human Nature, III. ii. 1, ed. Selby-Bigge, p. 481.

<sup>2</sup> J. F. Stephen, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*, 2nd ed., p. 300.

He cannot show that social affection to be real must take in humanity as a whole; the social affections are not fully reconciled with the private; and the admission of 'unnatural' affections remains to the end a blot in the harmony of the whole. The 'scheme of moral arithmetic' to which he appealed<sup>1</sup> has a dubious result, and, by its very nature as a summation of particulars, could never establish the organic unity at which he aims.

social and  
private  
affections.

In the doctrine of the Moral Sense Shaftesbury has another means for exhibiting the purpose and unity of man's nature. This 'sense of right and wrong' is asserted to be a "first principle in our constitution,"<sup>2</sup> and to it appeal is made for our knowledge of "the eternal measures and immutable independent nature of worth and virtue";<sup>3</sup> by it also the virtue or merit, which "is allowed to man only," is distinguished from the mere goodness which "lies within the reach of all sensible creatures." Shaftesbury did not enter into any thorough analysis of this sense; but he brought out with sufficient clearness its reflex nature. "In a creature," he says, "capable of forming general notions of things, not only the outward beings which offer themselves to the sense are the objects of the affections, but the very actions themselves, and the affections of pity, kindness, gratitude, and

3. The  
theory of  
the Moral  
Sense.

<sup>1</sup> Inquiry, II. ii. concl., p. 173.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., I. iii. 1, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., I. ii. 3, p. 36.

their contraries, being brought into the mind by reflexion, become objects. So that, by means of this reflected sense, there arises another kind of affection towards those very affections themselves, which have been already felt, and are now become the subject of a new liking or dislike.”<sup>1</sup>

(a) Hutcheson's view of the moral sense.

This doctrine of the moral sense was carried out to important but divergent results by Shaftesbury's intellectual successors, Hutcheson and Butler. Hutcheson elaborated the doctrine systematically and in detail in various works; and in his last book, the ‘System of Moral Philosophy,’ the protest against the egoism of Hobbes, carried on by the whole school, finds expression in a complete theory of human nature, in which the ‘moral sense’ is supreme, and the ends of conduct are independent of self-interest. Hutcheson, too, approaches more closely than either Shaftesbury or Butler did to the way of looking at human nature which is spoken of in this volume as ‘naturalistic.’ For he denies that reason has any independent function in determining the constitution and direction of the moral sense.<sup>2</sup> The questions thus arise—(a) What is the

<sup>1</sup> Inquiry, I. ii. 3, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> “What is Reason but that sagacity we have in prosecuting any end? The ultimate end proposed by the common moralists is the happiness of the agent himself, and this certainly he is determined to pursue from instinct. Now may not another instinct towards the public, or the good of others, be as proper a principle of virtue as the instinct toward private happiness?” —Hutcheson, Inquiry, p. 115.



moral sense when not regarded as a rational determination of the ends of conduct? and (b) To what determination of ends or other distinction between right and wrong in action does it lead? On both these points there is some difference—of emphasis, at least, if not of definite doctrine—between his early ‘Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue’ (1725), and the more mature ‘System,’ published in 1755, eight years after his death.

Two questions regarding it:

Hutcheson is in earnest with the rejection of reason as a creative force. The moral sense is not, he says, a source of new ideas. Its objects are received in the ordinary ways by which, through “sensation and reflexion,” we come by our knowledge.<sup>1</sup> But just as we have a sense of beauty in the forms of sensible objects, so there is a moral sense given us from which, in the contemplation of our actions, we derive “still nobler pleasures” than those of physical sensation. This moral sense is “a determination of our minds to receive amiable or disagreeable ideas of actions.”<sup>2</sup> So far, there-

(a) Nature of this faculty: not reason;

at first defined as feeling of pleasure or pain,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *System*, i. 97; *Inquiry*, p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> *Inquiry*, p. 124.

agent (and much more do we perceive pleasure in being conscious of having done such actions ourselves) without any view of further natural advantage from them.”<sup>1</sup> The significance of this position is easily seen. It is not only meant to give a criterion of moral action; it is also a short cut to the conclusion that virtue is for our private interest. The disquieting suspicion that morality may involve a sacrifice of individual happiness “must be entirely removed, if we have a moral sense and public affections, whose gratifications are constituted by nature our most intense and durable pleasures.”<sup>2</sup> The elaborate analysis of conduct and enumeration of the pleasures which various affections and actions bring in their train, which Hutcheson gave in his latest work, were thus unnecessary as long as the position was maintained that the moral sense is emphatically a pleasure or pain, and that the pleasures it gives are the most intense and durable we have.

There was only an apparent contradiction in this theory which placed the test of morality in a pleasure consequent upon moral action, and yet

<sup>1</sup> Inquiry, p. 106.

<sup>2</sup> Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense (1728), p. xix. Cf. Inquiry, pref., p. viii. : “I doubt we have made philosophy, as well as religion, by our foolish management of it, so austere and ungainly a form, that a gentleman cannot easily bring himself to like it.”

held that such actions were not performed from interested motives. In the spirit of Butler's psychology, Hutcheson contends<sup>1</sup> that virtue is pleasant only because we have a natural and immediate tendency towards virtuous action; our true motive is "some determination of our nature to study the good of others"; and this, although not always immediately pleasant in itself, is yet succeeded by the calm satisfaction of the moral sense. The real weakness of Hutcheson's position is the fatal one that he cannot show that it corresponds with facts, that the pleasures incidental to the moral sense outweigh all others. Indeed, he defends his opinion in their favour only, in a way which reminds one of Mill's method in the 'Utilitarianism,' by making every juror stand aside unless he has pledged himself to morality.<sup>2</sup> It is open to any one, however, to hold that the pleasures of benevolent action and the 'relish' of the moral sense are not of sufficient hedonistic value to make up for the restraints they put upon conduct and the enjoyments they oblige one to forgo. Even if this position be not correct, it is merely a mistake in estimating doubtful quantities. The man who chooses the smaller pleasure will be the loser by his mistake; but we cannot

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Inquiry, p. 140 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Introduction to Moral Philosophy, translated from the Latin, 2d ed., 1753, p. 43; cf. Essay on the Passions and Affections, &c., p. 128.

say that the selfish man is to blame for not being benevolent, because the pleasures of benevolence and the moral sense are greatest, any more than we could blame the benevolent man for not being selfish, if selfishness should turn out on the whole to leave a greater hedonistic balance at the individual's credit.

afterwards  
spoken of as  
approbation  
or disappro-  
bation.

A more objective determination of the moral sense is sometimes given by Hutcheson, especially in his later work. Without professedly changing ground, he ceases to speak of it as a mere feeling of pleasure, and calls it approbation or disapprobation; and, although the approbation is still spoken of as pleasant, and the disapprobation as painful, 'approbation' and 'pleasure' are no longer used as synonymous.<sup>1</sup> "It is," he says,<sup>2</sup> "a natural and immediate determination to approve certain affections and actions consequent upon them; or a natural sense of immediate excellence in them, not referred to any other quality perceivable by our other senses or by reasoning." Nor is this approbation consequent upon the feeling of pleasure which the affection or action produces in us. The action is not "judged good because it gains to the agent the pleasure of self-approbation, but it gains to him this pleasure because it was antecedently good, or had that quality which, by the constitu-

<sup>1</sup> As in the Inquiry, cf. pref., p. ix.

<sup>2</sup> System, i. 58.

tion of this sense, we must approve.”<sup>1</sup> In further defining this ‘approbation’ of the good, however, he does not exhibit Butler’s tendency to explain it as a rational principle, but refers it to a “taste or relish”<sup>2</sup> for certain affections and actions, and this he takes no pains to distinguish from pleasure.

The analogy he seeks to draw between the moral sense and our other powers does not really favour a distinction of it from pleasure. “To each of our powers,” he says, “we seem to have a corresponding taste or sense, recommending the proper use of it to the agent, and making him relish or value the like exercise of it by another. This we see as to the powers of voice, of imitation, designing, or machinery, motion, reasoning; there is a sense discerning or recommending the proper exercise of them.”<sup>3</sup> That is to say, besides the sense of hearing, which has to do with sounds, there must needs be another sense which has to do with our way of hearing sounds; besides the sense of sight, which has to do with form and colour, there must needs be another sense which has to do with our way of perceiving form and colour; and so with every other activity, especially those which proceed from our ‘highest powers.’ A doctrine such as this sets no limits to the manufacture of additional

<sup>1</sup> System, i. 53.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., i. 59.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., i. 59.

senses. The whole view of human nature upon which it proceeds is one of meaningless complexity, which serves the one good purpose only of showing how much ethics has suffered from a defective psychology.

The mental objects or presentations which are distinguished from one another by the difference of their characteristic qualities, and which we therefore call colours, or sounds, or movements, are accompanied by varying degrees of pleasurable or painful feeling; and it is possible to hold that the moral sense is a name for such feelings following in the train of those complexes of presentations to which we give the name of actions, or of those other more permanent complexes we call affections. This, practically, was the position with which Hutcheson started in the 'Inquiry.' Benevolence pleased us and selfishness pained us; just as the taste of sugar was pleasant, and that of wormwood unpleasant. Perhaps Hutcheson departed from this theory, because he saw that if conduct was made a matter of taste, there would be no sufficient reason for condemning selfishness any more than an unusual liking in food or drink. He therefore relinquished, or seems to have relinquished, the view of the moral sense as a feeling of pleasure or pain; and under the influence, probably, of Butler, spoke of it as approbation or disapprobation. But he fell back on his original

theory by making this approbation depend on 'a taste or relish,' which only lends itself to interpretation as a peculiar feeling of pleasure.

The reflex nature of the moral sense is brought out more distinctly in the 'System' than in the 'Inquiry.' In his earlier work, Hutcheson had spoken of it as directly related to *actions*. But it was more consistent with its reflective character to regard it as having to do with mental powers or 'affections' in the first instance, and with actions only indirectly or mediately. "The object of this sense," he says,<sup>1</sup> "is not any external motion or action, but the inward affections or dispositions"; and this is made by him to account for the discrepancy which the deliverances of the moral sense show in regard to actions. It "seems ever to approve and condemn uniformly the same immediate objects, the same affections and dispositions; though we reason very differently about the actions which evidence certain dispositions or their contraries." This distinction is applied with unlimited confidence in its efficacy. By means of it he would explain the most fundamental differences in the moral codes of men and nations. Thus people unacquainted with the industrial improvements which give the character of permanence to property, may "see no harm in depriving men of their artificial

(B) The objects of the moral sense: first said to be actions;

afterwards to be affections;

<sup>1</sup> System, i. 97. The same view is implied in his Essay (1728), p. 276.

acquisitions and stores beyond their present use,"—that is to say, "no evil may appear in theft."<sup>1</sup>

But it is more important in another respect; for it enables the author to avoid the difficulty of finding a principle according to which the moral sense may be related to the empirical content of action. As long as the moral sense was simply spoken of as a feeling of pleasure, it could be conveniently regarded as the consequent of external actions. But if it is an internal sense distinct from pleasure, it is easier to relate it to what he calls our internal powers or affections than to action. The moral sense, then, is to be the regulator of all our powers: "its dignity and commanding nature we are immediately conscious of, as we are conscious of the power itself";<sup>2</sup> and by means of it Hutcheson attempts to reduce human nature to a scale of morality.

but its  
grounds of  
preference

It is to be noted that, in the classification he offers,<sup>3</sup> what are commonly called the virtues of candour, veracity, &c., are accounted not as virtues themselves, but only as immediately connected with virtuous affections: these are identified with the 'kind' or benevolent affections, directed to the happiness of sentient beings. Within the latter

<sup>1</sup> System, i. 93.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., i. 61.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., i. 68 ff. With this may be compared the elaborate classification of motives, according to their moral quality, in Dr Martineau's 'Types of Ethical Theory,' ii. 176 ff.



there are two grounds of preference: the deliberate affections are preferred to the passionate; those which are more extensive in the range of their objects to the less extensive. With regard to the former ground of preference, the "moral sense" of the community has perhaps undergone some modification since Hutcheson's time, and looks upon enthusiasm with less suspicion than it formerly did. The other ground of preference ascribed to the moral sense refers not so much to the affection itself—which is the direct or immediate object of the moral sense—as to the way in which the affection is applied, that is, the number of the objects to which it is directed. The affection of benevolence is the same in nature whether its object be wide or restricted; though difference in this respect profoundly influences the actions to which it leads. The object approved or most approved by the moral sense is therefore, according to Hutcheson, utilitarian conduct, or rather, as he would say, the calm disposition leading thereto.<sup>1</sup> In this way he obtains a principle for determining the morality of actions: but only through the arbitrary assertion that this principle is immediately approved by the moral sense. The connexion of the moral sense with an object such as universal benevolence, could only be made out by showing a rational, or at any rate an organic, union between individual sentiment and

mainly depend not on the nature of the affection, but on its objects.

<sup>1</sup> System, i. 50.

social wellbeing; and Hutcheson's only way of showing this is to exhibit the personal advantages of benevolent conduct, and the disadvantages that accompany selfishness.

(b) Butler's  
view of the  
moral sense.

Both Shaftesbury and Hutcheson were often led astray by a tendency to interpret facts as they wished them to be, rather than as they were. Their view of the consequences of action was coloured by their optimism. Butler, too, in spite of the difference in his general attitude to the value of human life, was not altogether free from a similar error. He thinks that Shaftesbury "has shown beyond all contradiction that virtue is naturally the interest or happiness, and vice the misery of such a creature as man."<sup>1</sup> But, in view of particular exceptions, or of any one not being convinced of "this happy tendency of virtue," he thinks it necessary to emphasise the "natural authority of the principle of reflexion." Conscience is, he holds, a part of our inward nature; but it differs from the other parts of our nature inasmuch as it is not related immediately to an external object, but to the actions dealing with such objects, and to the dispositions leading to those actions. It is a principle of "reflex approbation or disapprobation," which is said to have equal respect to public and to private good.

Conscience  
an authori-  
tative law,

<sup>1</sup> Sermons, Pref.

This tendency, however, would seem to be ascertained empirically. The deliverances of conscience are immediate judgments as to the morality of actions and affections (for Butler speaks of it as referring to both equally); and its reference to the ends to which those actions or affections may ultimately tend would, therefore, seem to be indirect.<sup>1</sup> Butler was careful, moreover, not to speak of it as an æsthetic or sensitive faculty, but as a judgment. It is not a feeling of pleasure, but the revelation of law.

The approval of conscience is thus made the and the criterion of morality. But a difficulty arises as criterion of morality. to the way in which we are to regard the authority which conscience is said to carry along with it. It "bears its own authority,"<sup>2</sup> says Butler. His utterances on this point commonly imply a teleological reference to an end implanted in human nature, and to be discovered by observing that nature—the realisation of the end being obligatory, because it is shown to be the purpose which the author of nature had in view in making man what he is.<sup>3</sup> The authority of conscience thus seems to be derived from the divine purpose which it displays. It carries within itself a claim to obedi-

<sup>1</sup> Although it is not "at all doubtful in the general, what course of action this faculty or practical discerning power within us, approves. . . . It is . . . justice, veracity, and regard to the common good."—*Dissertation on Virtue*.

<sup>2</sup> *Sermons*, ii.

<sup>3</sup> *Sermons*, ii. iii.

ence: but the justification of this claim depends on a theological basis. And hence the question of the nature and origin of conscience is at once raised, in order to determine the legitimacy of its claim to be, rather than any other part of our constitution, a divinely-implemented guide.

Teleological  
and jural  
views not  
reconciled,  
nor fully  
developed.

But more than one current of thought runs through Butler's ethical treatise. The theological reference is sometimes so used as to make the obligation to morality, and even the nature of morality, depend on the will of God: though hardly according to Paley's crude method of seeking in the external revelation of the divine command, a means of uniting the divergent interests of the individual and of society. In general, Butler's ruling idea is the idea of the system or unity of human nature, for which he was largely indebted to Shaftesbury's revival of the Platonic conception. Conscience is regarded by him as the expression of this unity. But its nature is never more deeply probed. Its deliverances are justified now by its supernatural mission, and now by the more prosaic fact that it leads to our individual interest<sup>1</sup>—at any rate, "if we take in the future"—while it could not be recommended as a guide if it did not.<sup>2</sup> On one side, therefore, Butler tends to a form of theological utilitarianism, such as was common in his own day, and was afterwards formu-

<sup>1</sup> Sermons, iii. v.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., ix.

lated by Paley.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, his ethics more naturally allies itself with a different theory, in which the moral law is conceived as having its source in practical reason, and the naturalistic basis of ethics is definitely abandoned.

On the whole, it would appear that the psychological ethics worked out by Shaftesbury and his followers occupies an insecure position between the view discussed in the two preceding chapters and that which sees in the spiritual nature of man something more than a reaction to sense-presentation, and assigns to reason a function in the formation of objects of desire. The school of Shaftesbury tried to strike out a middle course between the theory that ends of action may be determined by reason, and that which looks upon all desires as being desires for objects as pleasurable. They made the attempt to found a system of ethics on human nature, and they held that that nature could not be accounted for by the simple psychological analysis of the Epicurean school as then represented by Hobbes. On the other hand, they did not see their way to adopt the 'rational' ethics only known to them in the abstract form it had received at the hands of Clarke and Wollaston. But their own theory of human nature requires a principle of harmony and

4. The ethics of moral sentiment a mediating theory;

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Jodl, *Geschichte der Ethik*, i. 192.

explanation  
of its facts  
attempted  
by theory of  
evolution.

co-ordination among the various impulses of which they were unable to give a satisfactory account. It may seem, however, that the idea of the development of man, with which we are now familiar, may enable us to overcome the difficulties which formerly appeared insurmountable — showing the unity of human nature, and the tendency of its activity. The general course of evolution, to which all life has been subject, is thought to have brought about a harmony between individual and social feelings, as well as between individual and social interests, and thus to have removed the obstacles in the way of founding morality on the basis of Naturalism. It is, therefore, of importance to examine with care the ethical bearings of the theory of evolution. But, before proceeding to discuss this theory, it may be well to give some account of the way in which, independently of the doctrine of evolution, the course of nature has been appealed to as the standard of morality.

## CHAPTER V.

## NATURE AS THE MORAL STANDARD.

THE preceding chapters have been concerned with Subjective Naturalism. The 'nature' referred to has been that of the individual man; and the restriction implied by the 'naturalistic' view has been an interpretation of man's nature as consisting of reactions to sense-presentation which, in their occurrence and for their guidance, do not stand in need of any non-empirical factor. In the writers dealt with in last chapter, however,—at any rate, in Shaftesbury and in Butler,—we have found the recognition of a spiritual factor in human nature which prevented us from classing their doctrines as naturalistic. We have also found in Shaftesbury, and there may be found in Butler, a reference to the moral significance of the larger system of things in which human nature is included. And, in so far as this is present, their doctrine is not individualistic, nor even merely

Subjective  
and object-  
ive Natural-  
ism.

1. Pre-evolutionist views of the moral significance of nature.

social, but depends on their view of reality as a whole. The view of nature as a connected whole, and of its development in time, has been defined by modern science, and has given rise to what is sometimes called the 'ethics of evolution.' But, before going on to examine this theory in detail, it may be well to pass shortly in review earlier conceptions of the moral significance of nature, as these may shed some light on the later doctrine.

'Nature' contrasted with 'convention,'

The appeal to the moral authority of nature is most frequently met with in the literature which heralded the revolutions of the eighteenth century. The social, economic, and political order seemed to exaggerate the distinction between nature and convention; and the struggle against the latter thus came to involve an appeal to the former. But the idea was no product of the period; and it had a long and eventful history behind it. That morality was due to convention only and not to nature seems to have been a favourite thesis of more than one of the ancient Sophists;<sup>1</sup> and their criticism called forth a defence of the naturalness of morality. The assertion of this position became of greater importance for practical life when the old political and religious authority was weakened with the decline of the Greek state. And it was at this period that the Stoics, with full consciousness, put

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.*, Hippias in Plato's *Protagoras*, 337, and *Thrasymachus* in the *Republic*, i. 339.



forward the maxim 'live according to nature,' and based morality upon the laws of the world as a whole. At the same time the world was interpreted as a rational or divine order. For them Nature, Reason, and God had the same meaning; and the moral law could be described with equal accuracy as the law of nature, or the law of reason, or the law of God. In this scheme of thought the individual was not divided from the whole: human reason was held to be a part of the divine reason. This doctrine was elaborated and defined in controversy with the Epicureans, who adopted the Sophistic view that morality is the result of a convention, and who held that the state, which enforces the moral law, is itself the result of an 'original compact.'

The Stoic conception inspired the appeal to nature which characterises much of eighteenth-century ethics, after it had itself been modified in various ways in the course of ages. It had been defined by the Roman jurists, who found in it a philosophical basis for law. The Stoic 'law of nature' seems also to have been confused with the *jus gentium* — the rules for the decision of causes in which one of the parties was not a Roman citizen, and therefore not a participant in the privileges of the Roman or civil law. This system was characterised by simplicity of ceremonial and by disregard for differences of race or

social position. And on this account it seems to have come to be identified with the Stoic conception, and to have been looked upon not simply as a means of settling the disputes of persons outside the pale of citizenship, but as the law of nature of which all positive codes were corruptions, or to which they were approximations. The 'law of nature' thus gained content through being identified with an actual code. A further gain resulted from a further confusion, when the *jus gentium* was identified with the laws or customs which regulate the relations of nations to one another: so that what is now called international law gained the dignity of the law of nature, and the phrase 'law of nature and of nations' arose.

New scope was given for the application of this law of nature to morals and politics by the weakening of political and ecclesiastical authority which marked the close of the middle ages. The dogmas of the freedom and equality of men, under the 'law of nature,' had already become part of the stock-in-trade of philosophical jurists; they stood ready to be utilised by the critic of political and economic institutions; and the 'nature' from which they were supposed to be derived might serve as a guide for conduct.

2. Influence of this conception on the English moralists.

The influence of this conception upon the English moralists is obvious. Hobbes's theory is throughout a satire upon the doctrine of the morality or

excellence of nature. His 'laws of nature' imply the abrogation of the 'state of nature' and the restraint of man's natural impulses. The nature of man, according to him, is not simply non-moral: it is contra-social, and therefore opposed to that which is the origin of morality. On the other hand Locke, writing in the interests of the English Revolution Settlement, maintained the Stoic view of a law of nature, the authority of which cannot be superseded even by the contract which sets the sovereign on the throne. The philosophical conception which underlies this view is alien to the general theory of Locke; but it is, as we have seen, of the essence of Shaftesbury's doctrine. The same point of view is to be found in Butler. His first work is mainly occupied with human nature; his later work, the 'Analogy,' adds to this a view of nature in the wider sense—or what might be called Greater Nature—as also a moral force. Both con-  
Butler's  
view of  
nature as a  
moral order.  
 ceptions are governed by the doctrine that Nature, whether in the larger or in the narrower sense, is a constitution or system. It is neglect of this consideration that makes some men say that in following impulse they are obeying nature,<sup>1</sup> or that particular instances of successful vice or suffering virtue are inconsistent with "the wisdom, justice, and goodness of the constitution of Nature."<sup>2</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> Sermons, ii. ; Works, ii. 20 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Analogy, part ii. chap. iv. ; Works, i. 187.

essence of human nature is to be found in certain reflective or rational principles which have obvious authority over the particular affections or impulses; and the essence of Greater Nature consists in this that it is "a scheme in which means are made use of to accomplish ends, and which is carried on by general laws."

As this scheme is only imperfectly known to us, it is impossible for Butler to put forward Greater Nature as the moral standard for conduct. At the same time, this imperfection in our knowledge is used as an answer to all objections to the morality of nature, and allows Butler to maintain that "the natural and moral constitution and government of the world are so connected as to make up together but one scheme," and that "it is highly probable that the first is formed and carried on merely in subserviency to the latter, as the vegetable world is for the animal and organised bodies for minds."<sup>1</sup> The scheme of human nature is, however, more clearly revealed: though, in Butler's first exposition of it, he seems unable to decide between the relative claims of the two systems, private and public, to which man by his nature belongs. On the whole, however, and in spite of this hesitation, he looks upon Conscience as the ultimately authoritative guide. The standard of morality is thus found in human nature, and in human nature

<sup>1</sup> Analogy, part i. chap. vii. ; Works, i. 126.

in so far as it is charged with a power of reviewing and judging impulses and their ends: as we might say, in so far as it is the "vehicle of a spiritual principle."

In all this, although moral authority is ascribed to nature, there is no trace of what is now technically called 'naturalism.' Conscience is supreme in man, and represents the divine purpose; and the divine scheme—could we comprehend it—would explain both man and the world. In both the spiritual principle is the highest, and the highest has the right to rule. It is when the appeal is made to nature as contrasted with spirit, or to instinct as against reason, that the influence of a different view, allied to 'naturalism,' may be traced. The old contrast between 'nature' and 'convention' easily passes into an opposition between the natural and the reflective. This is to be seen not only in the early work of Rousseau,<sup>1</sup> and in much of the literature of the period, but also in a philosophical writer whose point of view closely resembles Butler's.

The natural  
contrasted  
with the  
reflective:

Rousseau.

In his treatise on the 'Moral Sentiments' Adam Smith finds the ethical standard in human nature, and he also defends the morality of Greater Nature

Adam  
Smith.

<sup>1</sup> *Discours sur l'origine et les fondemens de l'inegalité parmi les hommes* (1753). In the *Contrat Social* (1760) the superiority of the natural state of man to the civil or political is no longer asserted.

in a manner similar to Butler's. It is only, he says, when the "general rules by which prosperity and adversity are commonly distributed" are considered in a "cool and philosophical light" that they "appear to be perfectly suited to the situation of mankind in this life." Though "established for the wisest and best purposes, they sometimes produce effects which shock all his [man's] natural sentiments." But man is himself a part of nature, an instrument in the hands of providence. He "is by nature directed to correct, in some measure, that distribution of things which she herself would otherwise have made." In this way, "like the gods of the poets, he is perpetually interposing, by extraordinary means, in favour of virtue and in opposition to vice, and, like them, endeavours to turn away the arrow that is aimed at the head of the righteous, but to accelerate the sword of destruction that is lifted up against the wicked." Yet it is an unequal strife, even although nature may herself have armed her opponent: "the natural course of things cannot be entirely controlled by the impotent endeavours of man: the current is too rapid and too strong for him to stop it."<sup>1</sup> It would seem, therefore, that Greater Nature cannot be a moral guide for conduct, since it is open to correction by man. It is only when we understand the 'general rules' by which it

<sup>1</sup> *Moral Sentiments*, part iii. chap. v.

works that we can vindicate its morality. Smith is not far from Butler's position, that nature is good because it comes from God, and that, if we cannot always see its goodness, this is due to our imperfect comprehension of the system of nature as a whole.

The conception of the natural order as a divine order underlies the whole fabric of the 'Wealth of Nations,' though it is expressed only in one or two remarkable sentences. And in this work the author shows no favour towards that interference with the natural disposition of things for which he had left room in the 'Moral Sentiments.' His survey of the different systems of state-regulated industry had convinced him that the state invariably went wrong when it interfered with the "natural progress" of opulence. This progress moves, he thinks, in an orderly manner, beginning with what is fundamental or necessary to human subsistence, and gradually raising upon this the superstructure of social refinement; and the same process is held to be in harmony with the natural inclinations of the individual. But governments, in trying to anticipate the end of the process, have reversed the natural order, and thus hindered the growth of national wealth.<sup>1</sup> Nature is looked upon by Adam Smith as working through the impulse of the individual towards self-preservation

<sup>1</sup> *Wealth of Nations*, book iii. chap. i.

—"the natural effort of every individual to better his own condition"—towards a further end.<sup>1</sup> He distrusts any deliberate or conscious effort even of the individual towards this further end, as interfering with the means which are overruled by providence for its attainment. And the action of the state, in so far as it involves the deliberate guidance of industry, is looked upon as outside of and indeed opposed to nature. Individual effort directed to individual welfare is natural, and, as such, part of the providential scheme which produces social welfare out of individual selfishness; but, so far as directed to other or altruistic objects, it also is regarded with suspicion,—indeed with derision.<sup>2</sup>

Amidst the looseness of thought which character-

<sup>1</sup> *Wealth of Nations*, book iv. chap. ii. : "He intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention." Cf. Kant, *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte* (1784); *Werke*, ed. Hartenstein, iv. 143 : "Einzelne Menschen und selbst ganze Völker denken wenig daran, dass, indem sie, ein jedes nach seinem Sinne und einer oft wider den anderen ihre eigene Absicht verfolgen, sie unbemerkt an der Naturabsicht, die ihnen selbst unbekannt ist, als an einem Leitfaden fortgehen, und an derselben Beförderung arbeiten, an welcher, selbst wenn sie ihnen bekannt würde, ihnen doch wenig gelegen sein würde."

<sup>2</sup> *Wealth of Nations*, book iv. chap. ii. : "By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good. It is an affectation, indeed, not very common among merchants, and very few words need be employed in dissuading them from it."



ises Adam Smith's use of the term 'natural,'<sup>1</sup> the pretty constant implication may be discovered of an opposition to the deliberate or reflective. Nature is not regarded, in the way Butler regarded it, as expressing its essence when it becomes reflective and self-conscious. The 'natural' is the fundamental and immediate, the instinctive rather than the reflective: though the moral character of this 'natural order' rests upon the assumption of a divinity which shapes our ends and subordinates them to purposes of its own. The end which Nature (in the larger sense) may be said to have in view is social as well as individual; but Smith holds that the 'invisible hand' that directs it makes use of individuals as its instruments to the almost complete exclusion of states.

As we have seen the word 'natural,' as it is used in ethical and political discourse, is not merely ambiguous: it is a tangled skein in which no one thread of meaning can be drawn out long. But two meanings predominate amidst the confusion; and these meanings are distinct and even antagonistic. In the first place, the 'natural' may mean the primitive—something that belonged to

3. Ambiguity of the term 'natural':

<sup>1</sup> Hasbach distinguishes the following meanings: rational; in the natural course of things; according to human nature; self-evident; usual.—*Philosophische Grundlagen der von Quesnay und Adam Smith begründeten politischen Ökonomie* (1890), p. 87.

as equivalent to the primitive,

the thing in question from the time that it first began to be. In this sense, if we said that man is 'naturally' a moral being, we should mean that at no period of his history was he without moral ideas for the guidance of conduct; and, if we were to say that he should be guided by 'nature,' we should be implying that moral authority belongs to the primitive to the exclusion of the mature and developed: that instinct, for example, is to be preferred to reason, that the physiological nature of man is a better guide than the spiritual. The other mean-

or as referring to the state which realises the idea of a thing.

ing of the term is very different. In it the 'natural' condition of a thing may be said to be that condition which it is fitted to attain, in which its possibilities have their fullest and appropriate exercise, or which, in a word, realises the idea of the thing. In this sense to say that man is 'naturally' a moral being has a different meaning from what it had before. It means that morality is necessary for the realisation of the 'end' to which he is adapted. And, if it be said that we should live 'according to nature,' this phrase also acquires a new meaning: for 'nature' is now identified with the realisation of an idea, for which instinct and physiological process are alike subordinate to rational and spiritual development. In this latter sense the term was used by Aristotle when he asserted that man was by nature a social or political being and that the stateless man must be either less or more than

human. With the Stoics also, and the greater writers who were inspired by the Stoics, the emphasis was not laid on the primitiveness of reason, when the natural was identified with the rational. But it would seem that it is not easy always to keep strictly to the distinction between logical and temporal priority. When common consent is made the test of truth, as it was by Cicero,<sup>1</sup> or when appeal is made to the 'quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus' of ecclesiastical tradition, the implication is that what is always found, and was therefore present from the beginning, is an authoritative guide for thought and action.

In this way the authoritativeness of reason or conscience would depend on its priority in time. But to assert that reason rather than instinct is primitive in man would be a hard saying. Besides, the appeal to nature seems always to have been accompanied by a criticism of the conventions and artifices of an existing social order. A simpler order was desired, and it was easy to confuse the simplicity of instinct with the simplicity of reason. The confusion has been illustrated from the writings of Adam Smith; but it was shared by many other writers of his own and other times. The confusion itself is very simple. The authority claimed for 'nature' depends upon its goodness; and, for Smith and others, this means

<sup>1</sup> "Omnium consensus naturæ vox est."—Cicero, *Tusc.* i. 35.

that it depends upon its divine origin. But, because a spiritual plan dominates the world, it does not follow that what is primitive in each part is to be preferred to that which is of later growth: instinct is not more 'natural' than reason.

The theory of Natural Law and Natural Rights, in which moral authority is in one way or another ascribed to nature, can be reached only if nature be looked at from a point of view which is neither 'naturalistic' nor empirical. This theory, to which were due the 'ideas of the revolution,' flourished best in the soil of an *a priori* philosophy. In England the 'ideas of the revolution' were almost supplanted, early in the nineteenth century, by a system of 'philosophical radicalism' framed by empirical thinkers. Bentham saw quite clearly that the doctrine of a law of nature and of natural rights introduced an *a priori* element into thought which was inconsistent with the empirical philosophy. And it was largely owing to his influence that the appeal to nature ceased to find favour with English moralists and jurists.<sup>1</sup>

4. Mill's  
criticism of  
the morality  
of nature

The disregard into which the conception had fallen lends freshness to the method of treatment which it received in J. S. Mill's essay on Nature.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bonar, *Philosophy and Political Economy*, p. 385.

<sup>2</sup> Written between 1850 and 1858; first published (posthumously) in his *Three Essays on Religion*, 1874.

Mill was perhaps not fully alive to the important historical antecedents of the conception. But he was at least unaffected by its ambiguities, and, when he spoke of 'nature,' meant the same thing by the word as does the writer on natural science. He looked upon the doctrine of the moral authority of nature as no longer an element in the philosophical literature of his day, but as simply the survival of an old fallacy, whose influence on popular thought still required to be exposed. In its theological bearing Mill's view of nature is closely related to that of Butler in the 'Analogy': though he emphasised the imperfections which appear to us in the working of natural forces in a manner foreign to Butler's unimpassioned intelligence, and drew from them a very different inference. Apart altogether from its theological applications, the doctrine of the essay is of peculiar interest, for it occupies a middle position between older modes of thought and those which are specially characteristic of the present day.

The views of Mill cannot be better expressed than in his own summary:—

"The word Nature has two principal meanings: it either denotes the entire system of things, with the aggregate of all their properties, or it denotes things as they would be, apart from human intervention.

"In the first of these senses, the doctrine that

man ought to follow nature is unmeaning; since man has no power to do anything else than follow nature; all his actions are done through, and in obedience to, some one or many of nature's physical or mental laws.

"In the other sense of the term, the doctrine that man ought to follow nature, or in other words, ought to make the spontaneous course of things the model of his voluntary actions, is equally irrational and immoral.

"Irrational, because all human action whatever consists in altering, and all useful action in improving, the spontaneous course of nature:

"Immoral, because the course of material phenomena being replete with everything which when committed by human beings is most worthy of abhorrence, any one who endeavoured in his actions to imitate the natural course of things would be universally seen and acknowledged to be the wickedest of men."<sup>1</sup>

"In sober truth," he says in another passage, "nearly all the things which men are hanged or imprisoned for doing to one another are nature's everyday performances."<sup>2</sup>

shows the impossibility of regarding either the external order of nature,

In his passionate denunciation of natural forces Mill treats them as forming a stationary system; he takes little or no account of the view that nature may be progressively working out an end

<sup>1</sup> Three Essays on Religion, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

in interaction with human beings. "If Nature and Man are both the works of a Being of perfect goodness," he says, then "that Being intended Nature as a scheme to be amended, not imitated, by man."<sup>1</sup> He overlooks the hypothesis, which is surely complementary to his own, that Nature may be intended to draw out and develop human character. The idea that man, the highest product of nature, is both educated by nature and the instrument by means of which natural law may be turned to moral ends is suggested by many of his arguments, and may have been prevented from receiving distinct expression only by his underlying assumption that nature is radically bad. Had Mill written a few years later, a wider view of man's relation to natural forces might have been forced upon his attention by the theory of evolution.

Even within the essay there are considerations which might have led the author to bring into prominence this other aspect of the relation between nature and man. Having shown the impossibility of adopting the external course of nature as a rule of life, he asks what moral guidance can be given by the nature of man himself. "There is," he says, "one particular element in the construction of the world, which to minds on the lookout for special indications of the Creator's will, has appeared, not without plausibility, peculiarly fitted

or the  
primitive  
factors of  
human na-  
ture, as the  
moral stand-  
ard;

<sup>1</sup> Three Essays on Religion, p. 41.

to afford them—viz., the active impulses of human and other animated beings.”<sup>1</sup> This view, if unqualified in statement, would, as Mill points out, obliterate the whole distinction between good and evil in conduct. With it we are already familiar: it results from the confusion of the prior in time with the higher in importance, so that impulse and instinct are thought to be superior in moral authority to deliberation, perhaps as being more immediate effects of the divine handiwork. Mill’s treatment of this doctrine gives an interesting indication of his own views. He does not in so many words maintain that man is radically bad; but “it remains true,” he says, “that nearly every respectable attribute of humanity is the result not of instinct, but of a victory over instinct.” “It is only in a highly artificialised condition of human nature,” he adds, “that the notion grew up or, I believe, ever could have grown up, that goodness was natural: because only after a long course of artificial education did good sentiments become so habitual, and so predominant over bad, as to arise unprompted when occasion called for them.”<sup>2</sup> If we judge instinct by the conduct of early and uncivilised races, we find neither virtue nor the love of virtue, only a capacity for acquiring it. Hobbes had long before described the pre-social or savage life as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short”;

<sup>1</sup> Three Essays on Religion, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 46.



Mill adds a companion picture of the nature of savages: selfish, passionate, cowardly, dirty, always liars, and without any sense of justice. It is only because mankind are guided by interest, that is, in so far as a deliberate estimate of consequences overrules instinctive action, that the tendencies to evil do not overcome the tendencies to good in human nature.<sup>1</sup> The rational factor in progress is exaggerated by Mill; but its importance is rightly emphasised as against instinct's claim to guide, and its influence has been constantly on the increase. It ought to be observed, however, that the beneficial effects of rational guidance depend upon the insight which reason gives into the natural and social conditions of welfare. To understand the laws of nature and of social wellbeing, is to have taken the first step towards adapting conduct to circumstances; and the individual human being is educated and moralised through this intelligent adaptation.

For the appeal to nature Mill substitutes a deliberate calculation of the felicitic results of conduct. But even this calculation depends upon knowledge of the nature of man and of the world. It does not prove nature to be the standard of right and wrong; but it does show that the moralisation of man has taken place by interaction with a natural and social order, which may therefore

but over-looks the influence of the natural order on the growth of moral character.

<sup>1</sup> Three Essays on Religion, p. 53.

claim to stand in intimate relation with human morality.

The older doctrine of the moral significance of nature depended, in the last resort, on an implied reference to a divine order which it was man's duty to understand and follow. Against this doctrine Mill laid down the counter-position that, if God is good He must intend the happiness of His creatures, and that this result can only be attained by correcting nature, not by following it: seeing that the course of nature, if uninterfered with, leads to misery. But this opposition of nature to morality is more abrupt than his premisses justify. It is something that nature lends itself to improvement. It is besides an orderly system; and it promotes order amongst those who live within it. It displays adaptations; and it encourages their foresight. To improve it needs effort and co-operation: so that its very imperfections are fitted to cultivate the personal and social virtues of man.

Had Mill written a few years later it is not likely that he would have been content to regard nature as a stationary system. Even before the publication of his essay, Darwin's work had modified the scientific view of the relation of living beings to their environment; and the suggestion had been already made that the new theory of evolution might be able to explain morality and

furnish the guidance for conduct which had been sought in vain from older doctrines about Nature. Mill's criticisms did not prevent the elaboration and wide acceptance of an 'ethics of evolution.' But they seem to have penetrated within the inner circle of the evolutionists, and, twenty years after his death, his passionate impeachment of the methods of Nature was echoed in Huxley's equally vigorous denunciation of the immorality of the Cosmic Process. "Nature," said Mill, is "a scheme to be amended, not imitated, by man." And, for similar reasons, Huxley contended "that the ethical progress of society depends, not on imitating the cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in combating it."<sup>1</sup> To determine the measure of truth in this opinion requires an independent examination of the theory of evolution in relation to morality.

Mill's criticism repeated by Huxley, from the evolutionist point of view.

<sup>1</sup> Evolution and Ethics (Collected Essays, vol. ix.), p. 83.

## PART II.

### THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION.

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#### CHAPTER VI.

#### THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORALITY.

1. General  
characteris-  
tics of the  
theory of  
evolution:

To relinquish the individualistic theory of ethics does not necessarily imply a recourse to evolution. It may still be possible to rest the foundation of ethics on the state, without that view of the growth of the community and of its connexion with the individual which the theory of evolution involves. This, as has already been pointed out, was, in part, what Bentham did; while an attempt—in some respects more elaborate still—to deduce morality from society was made by Hobbes. The theory of Bentham, and of his successor Professor Bain, is indeed partly individualistic, partly social.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The social basis of ethics is emphasised by Bain in his Practi-

In the former reference, ethics becomes a theory of prudence; in the latter, a part of legislation. With Hobbes, on the other hand, the identification of individual and social interests is supposed to be brought about by the absolute necessity, for personal security, of a supreme political power, into the hands of which all men have agreed to transfer their rights to all things. But both Hobbes and Bain might have avoided obvious difficulties had they had the theory of evolution to assist them, and had they thought themselves justified in making use of it.<sup>1</sup> For want of it the former had to explain morality and its binding force by means of the fiction of an 'original contract'; while the latter had to account by the associations of a few years for the harmony of feeling between the individual and the whole, and for the good of the community coming to be so faithfully reflected in the consciences of its mem-

cal Essays (1884), p. 155: "'How is society to be held together?' is the first consideration; and the sociologist—as constitution-builder, administrator, judge—is the person to grapple with the problem. It is with him that law, obligation, right, command, obedience, sanction, have their origin and their explanation. Ethics is an important supplement to social or political law. But it is still a department of law. In any other view it is a maze, a mystery, a hopeless embroilment."

<sup>1</sup> Without denying that it is possible to apply the theory of evolution to mind, Bain holds that, as a fact, moral sentiment has not become organic and hereditary—"that there are no moral instincts properly so called."—*The Emotions and the Will*, p. 56.

bers. The theory of evolution gives a scientific basis for this existing solidarity between man and society.

The consensus of opinion amongst those who are best qualified to judge—amongst those who alone are qualified to judge—may be regarded as having established the claim of the theory of evolution to give the most satisfactory account of all forms of natural life. And it may seem only advancing the theory a step further, or only developing one of its applications, to make it yield a complete explanation of human nature, mental as well as physical. If ethics, then, is to be founded on a ‘natural’ basis, no theory would seem to be complete which leaves evolution out of account.

an assertion  
of the unity  
of life;

In general (the theory of evolution is an assertion of the unity of life) or, (in its widest form, of the unity of existence.) The facts of heredity and variation, coupled with the ‘selection’ of those varieties which are best adapted to the environment, are, it is contended, sufficient to explain the different forms and species which life now manifests. The assumption is specially discarded that there are fixed differences between kinds of living things making it impossible for them all to have developed from simple germs, which have, in the course of time, become more heterogeneous and complex, and so give rise to the wealth of organic

life. The general doctrine of evolution—in itself almost as old as the history of thought, and held in modern times by Kant, Wolff, and Lamarck—needed to be supplemented by a definite view of the way in which progressive modifications have taken place; and this view required to be established as a really operative cause, before evolution could receive scientific proof. This more special element of the theory was Darwin's contribution to the subject. Evolution, he showed—and herein consists his theoretical advance on Lamarck—has taken place by the 'natural selection' of those varieties of living beings which happen to be best fitted for survival in the struggle for existence. Organisms which have developed advantageous modifications tend to survive, and to transmit their modified structure to descendants, while organisms without such modifications are less able to preserve their life and to hand it on to successors. Older types, it is true, remain, but only in circumstances in which their continued existence does not seriously interfere with the organisms which, in the struggle for life, have developed a structure better suited to their environment: when more perfect and less perfect forms cannot exist together, only the better adapted survive.

The theory of evolution is thus primarily the history of an order of sequent facts and relations. in the first instance, historical

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have ethical  
conse-  
quences.

It is an account of the origin or growth of things which attempts to explain their nature and constitution by showing how they have come to be what they are. But, in so doing, it naturally reveals the method and tendency of this order. And it is by means of this its teleological aspect that we see how it may seem to be able, not merely to trace the development of historical facts, such as the feelings and customs of men, but at the same time to make a more real contribution to ethics by pointing out the course of action to which human nature is adapted. (It does not, like the old teleology, attempt to show that each thing has been formed with the design of subserving some particular purpose.) (On the contrary, it reverses this way of looking at things. The fitness of an organism to fulfil any definite end comes to be regarded as the result not of a conscious design, independent of the environment, but of the modifications produced in the organism through the necessity laid upon it by its surroundings of adapting itself to them or else disappearing. What the theory does show is, that adaptation to environment is necessary for life, and that organisms unable to adapt themselves pass away. Adaptation to environment will thus be implied in, or be an essential means towards, self-preservation and race-preservation, self-development and race-development. And, *should this preservation or development be looked upon as the end of*



*conduct*,<sup>1</sup> the adaptation to environment it implies may help to define and characterise the end.

Again: when an organism adapts itself to its environment, it does so by some modification being produced in its structure corresponding to the modified function required by the conditions of life. In this way, one organism increases in complexity in a certain direction, while another organism, in different circumstances, also develops a more complicated structure, though one of a different kind. Thus organisms, alike to begin with, become heterogeneous in nature through exposure to different surroundings. At the same time, by constant interaction with their environments, they become more definite and coherent in structure. Incipient modifications are developed and defined in different ways by different circumstances, and the parts of a living being are brought into closer reciprocal relations, and thus welded into a coherent organic whole. This is what Spencer meant by saying that evolution implies a transition from "an indefinite incoherent homogeneity to a definite coherent heterogeneity":<sup>2</sup> the whole process being interconnected in such a way that these different aspects of it—definiteness, coherence, heterogeneity—~~increase together~~ and imply one another. By

<sup>1</sup> An assumption which is often made without the justification of which it stands in need. See below, pp. 283, 321 ff.

<sup>2</sup> First Principles, 4th ed., p. 380.

this the inference would appear to be suggested that, if conduct is to harmonise with the conditions of evolution, this characteristic feature of it must be recognised in the ethical end.

Distinction  
of its his-  
torical and  
ethical  
aspects.

In saying this, I am perhaps anticipating results. But it is well to show at the outset how the essentially historical enquiry carried out by the evolutionists may be thought to imply conclusions which are ethical in their nature. To some, indeed, it will appear superfluous to have spent even a sentence in suggesting a *prima facie* case for the ethical importance of evolution. If there is one subject more than another, it may be said, which has secured a place for itself in the scientific consciousness of the day, it is the evolution-theory of ethics. Without question, the phrase has been received into the scientific vocabulary; but there is a good deal, even in the official literature on the question, to make one doubt whether it is always used with a distinct conception of its meaning. When reference is made to the 'ethics of evolution,' no more is sometimes meant—though a great deal more should be meant—than an historical account of the growth of moral ideas and customs, which may provide (as Sir L. Stephen expressed it) "a new armoury wherewith to encounter certain plausible objections of the so-called Intuitionists." This, however, would only affect the ethical psychology of an opposed school. The

profounder question still remains, What bearing has the theory of evolution, or its historical psychology and sociology, on the nature of the ethical end, or on the standard for distinguishing right and wrong in conduct? The answer to this question would be the 'reconstruction' and 'deeper change' which Stephen held to be necessary.<sup>1</sup> It is the ambiguity of the subject—or rather its twofold range—which has made the application of evolution to ethics look so obvious, and made a discussion of the easier question frequently do duty for a solution of the more difficult. The ethical writings of the evolutionists, indeed, often confuse the problems of history and theory in a way which presents the same difficulty to the critic as the works of the corresponding school in jurisprudence. In both, the writers seem disinclined fairly to put to themselves the question as to the kind of subjects to which so fruitful a method as that which has fallen into their hands is appropriate: what its conditions are, and whether it has any limits at all. Every one is now familiar with the evils of hypothetical history, and with the iniquity of the proverbial philosophic offence of constructing facts out of one's inner consciousness. The historical jurists deserve no little credit for the thoroughness with which this has been enforced by them; perhaps, too, the same lesson may be learned from the facts

<sup>1</sup> Science of Ethics, p. 6.

of the development of morality. But it may be questioned whether we are not at the present time more apt to confuse fact and theory in the opposite way: whether the science of law is not sometimes lost sight of in the history of legal institutions, and ethics in danger of being identified with the development of moral sentiments and customs.<sup>1</sup>

We may naturally expect (the theory of evolution to throw light on such questions as the growth of moral feelings and ideas, and of the customs and institutions in which morality is expressed and embodied.) But to show the process morality has passed through in the individual mind and in society still leaves unanswered the questions as to the moral ideal and the distinction between good and evil in conduct. It is necessary, therefore, to keep clearly before us the difference between the historical and the ethical problem, if we would successfully attack the subject of the bearing of the theory of evolution

<sup>1</sup> Since the above paragraph was first published the same point has been enforced in Huxley's *Romanes Lecture*: "The propounders of what are called the 'ethics of evolution,' when the 'evolution of ethics' would usually better express the object of their speculations, adduce a number of more or less interesting facts and more or less sound arguments, in favour of the origin of the moral sentiments, in the same way as other natural phenomena, by a process of evolution. . . . Cosmic evolution may teach us how the good and the evil tendencies of man may have come about; but, in itself, it is incompetent to furnish any better reason why what we call good is preferable to what we call evil than we had before."—*Evolution and Ethics* (Collected Essays, vol. ix.), pp. 79, 80.

on this fundamental question of ethics. (To the theory of evolution we are indebted for the opening up of a new field of investigation—the historical treatment of conduct.) But it is one thing to describe the way in which men have acted in the past: to determine the end for their action now is quite a different problem; and there is no reason why the distinction should be overlooked. The interest which belongs to the history of morality is not solely nor mainly due to its bearing on questions beyond the historical sphere. That its results will not be without relation—and that of an important kind—to some questions of ethical theory may well be expected. But it can only tend to confusion if we treat the development of morality, in the human mind and in society, from a preconceived attitude—dogmatic or agnostic—towards the central problem of ethics.

The way in which the theory of evolution is applied to ethical psychology is easy enough to understand in principle, though complex and obscure in many of its details. We have only to postulate that mental as well as bodily traits admit of modification and of inheritance,<sup>1</sup> and it at once follows that sentiments and ideas leading to actions which

2. The development of morality:  
(a) historical psychology.

<sup>1</sup> If we regard it as established that every mental change has a structural modification corresponding to it, the possibility of mental evolution and inheritance presents no new difficulty.

promote life will be encouraged and developed by natural selection. Thus parental and filial feelings, once originated, may have been developed through those families and tribes in which they were strongest, presenting a more united, and therefore stronger, front against hostile influences. • The feelings of tribal sympathy and patriotism, too, may have had a similar history. Those races in which they were strongest would, other things being equal, obtain the mastery over and exterminate other races in which they were relatively weak. The compactness of the community would even be promoted by that fear of the political and of the religious control in which (according to Spencer) the feeling of obligation had its root. In general, benevolence and sympathy amongst a people give it a solidarity from which it derives a stronger position, so that in turn the benevolent and sympathetic feelings gain free scope to develop and expand.

But the working out of this theory is not without its own difficulties. (The factor in evolution) which can be most clearly traced—(the principle of natural selection—is not itself a source of change or of the production of new results.) It is only the means by which advantageous changes are preserved and disadvantageous changes passed by. That it may have scope for operation two things are necessary: in the first place, living beings must

multiply at such a rate as to outrun the means of subsistence, and thus produce a 'struggle for existence'; and in the second place, there must be (co-operating with, but limiting, the principle of heredity) an independent principle of variation, in accordance with which the offspring of the same parents tend to differ from one another. In this way it comes about that the unfit are exterminated in the struggle, and that only the 'fittest' survive or—as the phrase has it—'are selected.' In spite of much patient investigation on the part of biologists, the causes of variation still remain obscure. It is not even possible as yet to decide with confidence between the Lamarckian view, adopted by Spencer, that variations are due to the unequal pressure of the environment which produces 'acquired modifications,' and that these are capable of hereditary transmission, and the view of Weismann that such modifications cannot be transmitted, and that the variations which are perpetuated are ultimately due to tendencies inherent in the reproductive cells of primitive organisms. But, in either case, the principle of variation is independent of natural selection and necessary for its working.

Now, if we suppose certain moral relations and the feelings corresponding to them to exist in a society, and to tend to greater certainty and fullness of life on the part of those who possess them, such relations and feelings will be favoured by the

Its difficulties : the origin of new feelings,

operation of the selective process, and will gradually be assimilated into the 'tissue' of the social organism. But this does not account for the origin of morality generally nor of any particular moral relation; it merely shows how, having been somehow originated, it has come to persist. (There are thus really two points to be considered in tracing the development of moral ideas—the question of origin and the question of persistence. Even if the latter can be accounted for by natural selection, the former must be referred to the obscure laws of variation, laws so obscure that variations in nature are frequently spoken of as if they took place by chance. (The two questions are involved at each stage in the progress of morality.) But it is at the initial stage that (the question of origin is of greatest importance: when the attempt is made to show how, in the course of time, and by the aid of purely physical and biological laws, feelings and conduct, from being merely natural and reflex, have acquired a moral character—when, in a word, the moral is being evolved out of the non-moral.) A difficulty comes to the front here which scarcely arises when we are simply tracing the various phases through which the moral consciousness has passed, and the various forms in which moral conduct and feelings have expressed and embodied themselves.

and of the  
moral con-  
sciousness;

The latter subject is obviously within the scope



of the theory of evolution, if that theory applies to the processes of the human mind and society as well as to those of external nature. It is, indeed, too often and too easily assumed that natural selection operates in the higher kinds of life in the same way and to the same extent as it operates in the lower. But the assumption is not justified. Each step in development involves a modification which has to be accounted for not by natural selection, but by the laws of variation. And in human life varieties of conduct and of social forms are to a large extent the result of known causes: they are due to intelligent purpose, in which the end is foreseen and means are deliberately adapted to it. The end which nature might blindly achieve by exterminating unfit varieties is aimed at directly, and brought about—when intelligent purpose is most successful—without any help from the operation of natural selection. In the realm of intelligence natural selection is replaced by purposive.

natural  
selection  
and pur-  
posive se-  
lection;

The transition is, of course, a gradual one; but it is none the less a transition to a new order of facts in which new causes operate. And it is in this transition to conscious action determined by an idea of its end that morality first appears. In importance it may be compared to the transition from the sphere of inorganic changes to that of life. It is not necessary to deny that it may be possible to trace the steps by which morality may have

(emerged from impulses, customs, and institutions whose origin can be traced to purely natural or non-moral causes)—any more than it is necessary for the biologist to deny the possibility of tracing the first beginnings of life from the inorganic. But the difference of the facts and their different modes of operation have to be recognised. Just as natural selection can have no place in inorganic evolution, because it requires, as a condition of its presence, the competition of living beings for means of nourishment, so, in the same way, its rule is coming to an end wherever conscious beings anticipate its operation by intelligent purposive action.

the develop-  
ment of  
feelings  
apart from  
natural  
selection.

A further difficulty has to be met by the theory of the development of morality, which is in a sense complementary to the initial difficulty encountered in differentiating the moral from the non-moral. This further difficulty awaits it at a subsequent stage of development (when the extension and refinement of moral feeling seem to have gone on in circumstances where there is no room for natural selection to work.) Thus it has been admitted that the feeling of sympathy, and the habitual exercise of mutual good offices among members of a community, strengthen that society, and make it fit to prevail in the struggle for existence over other similar societies, the members of which are not so much at one amongst themselves in feeling and in act.

But as benevolence and sympathy widen, and

become less closely connected with a definite association of individuals, such as the family or tribe, and there ceases to be a particular body to the welfare of which these social feelings contribute, the operation of the law of natural selection becomes less certain. This law only tends to conserve and perfect the feelings in question, in virtue of the fact that the associations to whose good they lead are successful in the struggle for life over other associations the members of which are not animated by like feelings. The one association lives and expands, while the others are unable to maintain themselves against the encroachments of their neighbours, and thus fall to pieces. (The law of natural selection, therefore, comes into play only when there are competing organisms struggling against one another for the means of subsistence and development.) Not only is it the case, therefore, that the sympathy which aids the weak who are unable to take care of themselves, does not seem to be of the kind that would contribute to success in the struggle for existence ;<sup>1</sup> but the more general

Cf. Darwin, *Descent of Man*, new ed., pp. 205, 206 : "With savages, the weak in body or mind are soon eliminated ; and those that survive commonly exhibit a vigorous state of health. We civilised men, on the other hand, do our utmost to check the process of elimination. . . . The aid which we feel impelled to give to the helpless is mainly an incidental result of the instinct of sympathy, which was originally acquired as part of the social instincts, but subsequently rendered, in the manner previously indicated, more tender and more widely diffused. Nor could we

and catholic our sympathies are, the less will the law of evolution help to preserve and develop them—because the less will they tend to promote the welfare of one rival association rather than that of another. Thus the growth of really unrestricted sympathy with men as men cannot have been promoted in this way. The ‘enthusiasm of humanity’ which animated the early Christians, the self-renouncing brotherhood of Buddha, the ‘philanthropy’ attributed to men like Xenocrates<sup>1</sup> who had freed themselves from the aristocratic prejudices of Athens, the ‘*caritas generis humani*’ of the Stoics, (such feelings) as these (could not have been encouraged, any more than they could have been produced, by the operation of natural selection) For, however much (they tend to elevate the human character, and to promote human happiness, they do not advance the welfare of one body of men to the exclusion of some other competitor in the struggle for existence.<sup>2</sup>)

But, although the law of natural evolution can-

check our sympathy, even at the urging of hard reason, without deterioration in the noblest part of our nature.” This “process of elimination,” which we “do our utmost to check,” is simply the operation of natural selection; and it is significant that Darwin held that it is only by opposing natural selection that we can save “the noblest part of our nature” from deterioration.

<sup>1</sup> Ælian, V. H., xiii. 30.

<sup>2</sup> If conscience has no other function than that assigned to it by Clifford, Lectures and Essay, ii. 169, “the preservation of society in the struggle for existence,” then it can never reach universal benevolence or prescribe “duties towards all mankind.”

not account, by survival of the fittest, for any progress made by universal benevolence, yet it might explain the value ascribed to the feeling of benevolence, when its object is the family or the community. Besides—as has already been pointed out—natural selection always implies an initiative got from elsewhere: it does not itself produce modifications; it only exterminates the unfit, thus allowing favourable variations to flourish and combine. It always implies an independent modification of the organism; its part is to select the modifications best fitted to promote life. Hence the mere fact of benevolence being universalised is not in itself an anomaly on the theory of natural selection, any more than is the fact of its being extended from the family to the tribe. Only, the latter extension is one which it perpetuates, the former is not. No aspect of the theory of evolution seems able to account for an extension of the feeling of universal benevolence among different people or throughout different societies. This feeling has neither tended to promote the welfare of the race animated by it to the exclusion of other competing races—for there are no competing races whom it could affect—nor can it be shown that it makes the individuals possessing it fitter to wage successful war against opposing forces than other individuals.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A difficulty of another kind is suggested by Bain, who holds that the "pleasure of malevolence" is not only a real element in

Its result :  
shows the  
social nature  
of the indi-  
vidual.

Apart from such special difficulties, however, comparative psychology has shed a new light on the mental structure of the individual. The facts it brings forward show that the nature of the individual man cannot be explained without taking into account the relations in which he stands to society by birth, education, and business. He is, from the first, surrounded by, and dependent upon, other individuals, and by a set of established usages and institutions which modify his life; and he is connected with these in such a way that it is impossible to consider him as merely acted upon by them and influencing them in turn. He has been produced by, and has become a part of them. His physical and mental structure bears the marks of the same influences as those by which his so-called environment has been formed. He is cell in the 'tissue' of which the body social is composed. This was partly recognised, it is true, before the theory of evolution had been elaborated. But the the human constitution, but greater than would be naturally called forth by the conditions and course of development. "It is remarked by Mr Spencer," he says, "that is was necessary for the progress of the race that destructive activity should not be painful, but on the whole pleasurable. In point of fact, however, the pleasure of destruction has gone much beyond what these words express, and much beyond what is advantageous to the collective interest of animals and of human beings alike. The positive delight in suffering has been at all stages too great."—*The Emotions and the Will*, p. 66. So far from adopting this argument, however, I must confess myself still amongst the unconvinced regarding the "pleasure of malevolence."

‘organic’ nature of the social union is confirmed by that theory, and determines the whole view of human life.

Now the various sentiments which bring one man into mental union with others act with greatest facility when men are connected with one another by some definite mutual bond such as that which forms the family, the clan, or the nation. The individual’s feeling of sympathy with his neighbours both promotes this social union and depends upon it. But it is characteristic of the theory of evolution to put the external aspect first—the social customs and institutions—and to trace from them the growth of the corresponding sentiments and ideas. Not word or thought or power, it holds, is to be regarded as the origin of morality: “Im Anfang war die That.” The whole composed of these units bound together by reciprocity of feeling and function is termed the “social organism”; and what has been called moral sociology shows the way in which the outward forms which express and embody morality have grown up and become part of it.

(b) Development of society.

In this connexion (the theory of natural evolution traces the process by which, from the rudimentary beginnings of society, the members composing it have gradually become more coherent amongst one another, related in definite ways instead of merely by chance, and more differentiated in function)

Certain rudimentary forms—such as the family (in its rudest structure)—and the corresponding instincts are presupposed. And from this basis the origin of institutions and customs, political, religious, and industrial, is traced. In giving form to these various customs and institutions, along with the corresponding sentiments, the course of social evolution has had the effect of gradually bringing out and cultivating those feelings and tendencies in the individual which promote the welfare of the community, while other individual tendencies, hostile to social welfare, have been repressed. Not sympathy and benevolence only, but honesty, temperance, justice, and all the ordinary social and personal virtues, may have their natural history traced in this way—by showing how they have contributed to the life of the individual, or of the society, or of both.<sup>1</sup> Through the operation of the laws of human development, the wicked are “cut off from the earth,” while the “perfect remain in it” and leave their possessions to their children. For those communities are always fittest to survive in which each member, in feeling and in act, is most at one with the whole. The tendency of evolution would seem to be to produce not merely an ideal but an actual identification of individual

<sup>1</sup> This subject is carefully discussed in Stephen's *Science of Ethics*. Cf. also Alexander's *Moral Order and Progress*, Wundt's *Ethik*, and Jhering's *Zweck im Recht*.



and social interests, in which each man finds his own good in that of the state. We may, therefore, pause to enquire what are the factors in the process which points to this result.

When we speak of 'development' or 'evolution' we use a word of many meanings; and when assertions are made about the development of morality it is well to know the exact meaning in which the term is used before we assent to them or deny them. We must know what factors are to be understood as included in the process if the assertion or the denial of the development of morality is to be of any significance. It was the discovery of natural selection as the dominant factor in evolution that formed (Darwin's) greatest achievement in biology; and in his works (the term is used with a precise meaning) (It is not always the same with the philosophical writings of his successors. They do not imitate their master's caution or rival his clearness of thought.) And the notion of development is applied to man and society without any adequate consideration of the question whether, in this case as in the former, natural selection is the sole or leading factor in the process. If it is meant to be implied that natural selection plays the same part in man's life, and, in particular, in his moral life, as it plays in the development of plants and animals, then, no

3. The factors of moral development

doubt, the notion of development is used with a consistent meaning throughout; but the doctrine put forward is in conflict with the plain facts of human experience. On the other hand, if further factors are involved, these should be pointed out, and the difference between the two notions of development made clear.

The consideration of this difference may be approached by quoting a passage from Professor Ward's Gifford Lectures. "Take," he says, "the passengers on a coach going through a glen here in Scotland: in one sense the glen is the same for them all, their common environment for the time being. But one, an artist, will single out subjects to sketch; another, an angler, will see likely pools for fish; the third, a geologist, will detect raised beaches, glacial striation, or perched blocks. Turn a miscellaneous lot of birds into a garden: a fly-catcher will at once be intent on the gnats, a bullfinch on the peas, a thrush on the worms and snails. Scatter a mixture of seeds evenly over a diversified piece of country: heath and cistus will spring up in the dry, flags and rushes in the marshy, ground; violets and ferns in the shady hollows; gorse and broom on the hilltops."<sup>1</sup> What happens in these different cases? The seeds are scattered equally over the ground. But, in the dry ground, the flags and rushes, the violets and

(a) Mode of  
operation of  
Natural  
Selection.

<sup>1</sup> Naturalism and Agnosticism, i. 295.

ferns die out. The same fate happens to heath in the marshes, and to rushes in the shady hollows. The seeds themselves can do nothing towards choosing the environment that will suit them. It is the environment only that selects them for death or life: here Natural Selection rules alone. But it is not quite the same with the birds turned into a garden. We do not find bullfinches starving on a diet of gnats, or fly-catchers choking on the worms, as we might find the shrivelled violet-seed that had fallen on the dry and exposed hilltop. (A sure instinct leads each species of bird to select for itself its appropriate food. That the accuracy of this instinct is largely due to the effects of natural selection upon previous generations need not be disputed.) (But) two things hold: in the first place, (natural selection could not be its sole cause;) no mere weeding-out process could produce this positive principle; and, in the second place, whatever its antecedents may be, subjective selection appears in the individual organism as a definite mode of reaction upon the environment, choosing that which is of interest, or pleases, or is suitable. (The operation of this principle of positive selection cannot, it seems to me, be attributed with any confidence to plant life: but its presence is unmistakable throughout the greater portion of the animal kingdom;) and its gradual emergence is no reason for overlooking its reality or its importance.

(b) Subjective Selection.

(Subjective Selection) is the name which has been given to this principle.<sup>1</sup> (The selection is among alternatives offered by the environment, but it is due to conditions which are within the organism. On the plane of animal life the environment of experience consists almost entirely of the objects of immediate perception, and the subjective conditions which determine the selection are of the nature of impulse or of instinct. In human life the possibility of ideal combination and rational foresight widen the view of the environment till it is transformed into the world of the statesman, the scientist, or the mystic; and the Subjective Selection takes the form of Rational Choice. An example of subjective selection in animals is the principle of sexual selection on which Darwin laid stress as a factor in development. But it is when subjective selection is guided by intelligent foresight, as it is in man, that its importance is fully shown; for then it becomes able to anticipate the selective process which would otherwise be worked out by nature, and to avoid the method of destruction which the latter entails.

Besides these principles of Natural and Subjective Selection there is another, which for our purposes deserves separate recognition. Following out the idea in the illustration already quoted from

<sup>1</sup> Ward, article "Psychology," Ency. Brit., 9th ed., vol. xx. p. 42 b.

Professor Ward, one might go on to say: (Land a miscellaneous shipload of emigrants on the wharf at New York: the farmer will set out for the pastures or wheat lands of the West; the artisan will seek work in a factory; the clerk will apply at the offices or stores; the wastrel will loaf towards the nearest saloon, and hang round for a job or a drink. They have all entered a social environment full of specialised activities, and each chooses the line which he thinks best suited to his own case. This is Subjective Selection.) But upon it there at once begins to operate (a new principle which sifts the results of this subjective selection from the point of view not of the individual, but of the system which he has entered. This may be called Social Selection.) By it the individuals who can adapt themselves are adopted and rewarded, while the others are passed by or suppressed. On the individual this force is apt to operate with something of the externality and relentlessness of natural selection. And yet the nature of its operation is different; it does not merely exterminate the unfit, it actively selects and promotes the welfare of the fit; for, however imperfect it may be, the methods of the social system reflect the intelligence, and the organised intelligence, of the community.

It is necessary to emphasise the reality not only of subjective selection but also of social selection on account of the important part they play in the

Co-operation  
of these  
factors in  
moral de-  
velopment.

development of morality. There is an attractive sound about the phrase 'natural selection in morals.' Once used it was sure to gain currency; for it seemed to bring all forms of growth into line under the same notion of development. But facts are of more consequence than simplicity of phrase; and an unprejudiced view of the facts shows that moral evolution implies factors which the student of biological evolution may disregard. As already pointed out, (natural selection is a factor in the development of morality) The enfeebled body and mind which follow intemperance give a superior chance to the temperate man in the struggle for life (the bold and alert are more likely to survive than the coward and the fool) the qualities of sympathy and orderliness which unite men into a society contribute to their security in danger, and to their success in conflict. But it may be confidently asserted that, had natural selection been the only force in operation, mankind would have accomplished but a small part of the path of moral progress which it has actually traversed. Along the whole line, subjective selection is implied in the performance of the actions which go to form character; and, as civilisation advances, reflexion and rational choice gradually assume a larger share in their guidance. And it is not by natural selection alone that the results are approved and perpetuated. Mind acts upon mind; and, within the

social order, the institutions and customs of the society contribute far more towards fashioning the morality of each individual than natural selection does. The ordinary member of society is often hardly touched by the latter; but from the constant influence of the social selection which guides his conduct even when it seems—and is—most his own, and which distributes to him all that he thinks he has earned himself—from this influence he can never escape. In this process social selection is operative—as truly, although not so patently, as in electing a member of parliament, or in hanging a murderer.

(Social Selection manifests itself in diverse ways, Modes of Social Selection, and two modes of its operation) in particular, need to be distinguished. (It may influence the individual from within or from without.) (In the former mode of operation it moulds the character internal, of the man, affecting his desires, and becoming an inseparable element in his will.) So far it is simply one of the determining factors of his Subjective Selection. But it also acts in another way in which it is analogous to, and apt to be confused with, Natural Selection.<sup>1</sup> The individual man is not only fashioned and framed by social influences, speaking the language, thinking the thoughts, fol-

<sup>1</sup> For the assertion of Professor Alexander that "the origin and growth of morality" is not merely analogous to, but "identical with the origin and growth of, natural species" (*Moral Order and Progress*, p. 262), I can find no evidence.

lowing the aims, which have come to him—he knows\*not how—as part of his social inheritance. He also stands face to face with society as part of his environment, upon which he acts, and which reacts upon him in turn. This degree of separation is implied in calling man an individual: he can look upon society as something outside of and opposed to himself; and it may act upon him after the manner of an external force. In this way (and external.) its mode of operation is analogous to that of natural selection.) But there is no identity and little resemblance between the two forces, though they may be sometimes directed to the same end. For example, both natural selection and social selection favour temperance at the expense of intemperance; but they do so in different ways. The method of (natural selection is simple: intemperate habits lead to diminished vigour and to failure in the struggle for the means of life.) (Social selection) on the other hand, acts more directly; it (dismisses the drunkard from positions of trust, or locks him up as ‘drunk and disorderly,’ or sends him to an inebriates’ home;) and it acts positively as well as negatively: the sober man is sought out by employers and placed in positions of profit and responsibility, and in numerous ways he is made to feel that society approves of him. In these cases it is clear that society acts deliberately and with foresight of the end. Social Selection is the



expression of conscious purpose; and the instruments which it uses to carry out its purposes are minds, and the institutions in which many minds express their collective will. If we insist on the attempt to comprehend within a single formula the whole selective process which directs moral development, then we should have to hold that this process is purposive; for it is certain that Social Selection implies purpose, and we cannot be certain that Natural Selection does not.

No account of human and social development can be accepted which overlooks the presence and influence of intelligent purposive selection. In sub-human development purpose may not be apparent: natural selection may be the only discriminating force, and variation may be assigned to the unknown. But in human life purpose is a fact of immediate experience. Deliberate volition is one of the causes which lead to varieties of life and conduct; and the social order which selects the varieties suited to it is directed by minds. It is true that the purposive factor emerges only gradually into clearness. It is also true that within any brief period the change in the mode of operation is so slight that the curve of development may have the appearance of a straight line; and this gives colour to the representation of moral progress as determined by merely 'natural' forces. We are apt not to detect a new factor when it is

introduced by insensible degrees; but this is a mere error of observation. Or we insist upon following the maxim that we should "interpret the more developed by the less developed,"<sup>1</sup> although this can only be accepted as a rule for tracing historical sequences, and not for explaining the nature of the forces at work. The gradual emergence of the purposive factor in development is no ground whatever for the assumption that it can be either reduced to, or accounted for by, non-purposive forces.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Spencer, *Principles of Ethics*, i. 7.

<sup>2</sup> The instructive account of moral progress in Professor Alexander's *Moral Order and Progress* (1889) brings out the historical continuity of the process of development, but with a tendency to interpret the higher by the lower, for which I can find no justification in the facts: while his method tends to obscure the distinctions laid stress on above.

## CHAPTER VII.

## EVOLUTION AND ETHICAL THEORIES.

BEFORE going on to enquire into the positive contributions to ethics which the theory of evolution has to offer, it is necessary to consider the relation it bears to the preceding individualistic systems of morals. It was by way of investigations in psychology and in the theory of society, that it first began to influence ethical thought. And, at first sight, it appeared to come as a natural ally of one of the opposed schools, dreaded by the side it opposed,<sup>1</sup> welcomed with open arms by that favoured with its friendship. But since the first shock of pained and pleased surprise, there have been rumours of dissension in the allies' camp;<sup>2</sup> and the distribution of parties has now become a matter of difficulty. The doctrine of evolution, first seized upon for rebutting the arguments of the

Bearing of  
the theory  
of evolution  
on previous  
ethical  
theories.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Miss Cobbe, in *Darwinism in Morals, and other Essays* (1872), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> And perhaps Huxley's Romanes Lecture (1893) may be regarded as a declaration of war.

intuitional moralists, has been found to transform rather than to destroy their system ; and the utilitarianism in whose interests the new controversial weapon was employed, seems to have been subjected to a parallel process of transformation. The bearing of evolution on egoism may appear to be even more fundamental. For the inheritance by an individual of the qualities acquired by his ancestors may be thought to establish scientifically the theory of the unity of the race, and, in doing so, to make the selfish system of conduct an anachronism.

1. On theories depending on moral sentiment or intuition.

It is not necessary to examine at any length the application of evolution to the theories which construct ethical principles on the basis of moral sentiment: because these theories have been found either to resolve themselves into a subtle form of egoistic hedonism, or else to rest their ethical system on a teleological or on a jural conception, which transcends the 'naturalistic' view of man. Evolution has its own explanation to give of the seemingly intuitive character of moral ideas—showing how their immediate necessity for the individual of the present day may be reconciled with their empirical origin in the mental history of the race. It attempts thus to supplant both egoism and intuitionism by the same doctrine of the organic union between individuals.

The phenomena of conscience and the moral sentiments had been brought forward to show

that the origin of morality was independent of the experience of the pleasurable or painful results of action: that certain actions and traits of character were immediately approved and pronounced to be right by the individual conscience, and certain others as inexplicably but infallibly disapproved and pronounced to be wrong. This phenomenon of moral approbation or disapprobation had indeed been thought by some—as has been already seen—to be only a special feeling of pleasure or pain. Even as such, however, it pointed to a peculiar harmony or sympathy between the feelings of the individual and the fortunes of society. For the pleasure or pain of the individual was seen to be excited by actions and dispositions which might be shown to involve the common interests, but were without special relation to his own.

Even on the 'empirical' interpretation of them, such facts of the individual mind were in need of explanation; and the theory of evolution has undertaken to show how the pre-established harmony grew up. The results of this explanation are, of course, not put forward as explaining the facts away, or depriving them of reality, but as enabling us to see their true place and bearing in the economy of human nature. In tracing the origin and history of the 'altruistic' and 'moral' sentiments of the individual, the theory of evolution has this end in view. It offers—so it is often said

Origin and history of moral sentiments and intuitions traced by evolution.

—terms of compromise between the ‘intuitional’ and the ‘empirical’ psychology of morals. It will admit the immediate and intuitive character in the individual of the sentiments which older empiricism had tried to make out to be composite, growing up in each person out of the materials afforded by his environment, and the experiences to which he was subjected. The theory of evolution contends for an empiricism on a larger scale, which will more closely connect the individual with the race, and both with their environment.

Bearing of  
this on their  
validity :

The question thus arises, What bearing has this psychological or ‘psychogonical’ theory on the ethical validity of moral intuitions and sentiments? It certainly does not follow that they are of no moral value, merely because their origin can be traced to simpler elements of experience. They would lose ethical importance only if it were first of all shown that their validity depended on their not being derived from, or compounded out of, other elements. As Professor Sidgwick says, “Those who dispute the authority of moral or other intuitions on the ground of their derivation must be required to show, not merely that they are the effects of certain causes, but that these causes are of a kind that tend to produce invalid beliefs.”<sup>1</sup>

But what the theory of evolution is able to determine with regard to moral intuitions or sen-

<sup>1</sup> *Methods of Ethics*, III. i. 4, 6th ed., p. 213.

sibilities would seem to be not so much their ethical validity or invalidity, as the range and manner of their ethical application. It attempts to show that particular moral beliefs or feelings have been originated and formed by certain external customs belonging to the conditions of social or family life. These customs have impressed themselves upon the mental structure, and reappear in the individual in the shape of organic tendencies to certain actions, or classes of actions, and of aversion to other actions, accompanied by a corresponding mental sentiment—or judgment—of approbation or disapprobation. Thus the individual comes instinctively to feel—or to judge,—“A ought to be done,” “B ought not to be done.” Now the evolutionist, as I conceive, does not proceed to infer that such judgments are invalid because he has shown how they originated—does not conclude (to use Sidgwick’s words) that “*all* propositions of the form ‘X is right’ or ‘good,’ are untrustworthy;” but he does ask in what way the history of these judgments affects their application.<sup>1</sup>

(a) He recognises, in the first place, that all such judgments are the natural result of a certain social condition, and that there is, therefore, some prob-

(a) different social conditions from which they may have resulted,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Sir F. Pollock, “Evolution and Ethics”—*Mind*, O.S., i. pp. 335 ff. Apart from the bearing of a utilitarian test on inherited instincts, to which Sir F. Pollock refers, I have tried to show what meaning they will have for the evolutionist who judges them solely from the point of view of his theory.

ability that ~~the~~ same kind of social state could not continue to exist were these moral judgments habitually disregarded in conduct. They have resulted from a certain state of society, and have been assumed — after insufficient experience, perhaps — to be required for the stability of that state, so that every action opposed to these moral judgments will probably tend to weaken social bonds. But the evolutionist's conclusions are not restricted to such generalities. He may show that certain moral judgments or sentiments have had their origin from the habits of union between individuals, and of respect for the rights of property, which have obtained in every relatively permanent society, and which may therefore be inferred to be probably necessary for the continued existence of any community; that certain other sentiments or intuitions have descended to present individuals from customs which have not been so universal in the history of societies, although the communities possessing them have shown greater vitality than those in which they were absent; while others, again, may be traced to institutions which, from their occasional and unprogressive character, may be shown to be neither necessary nor beneficial.

and consequent difference in their value for conduct;

The evolutionist will therefore contend that different degrees of value for the regulation of conduct belong to different moral intuitions or classes of them. If one class is habitually dis-



regarded, he may assert that historical evidence goes to show that society will fall to pieces, and the life of man become, in the expressive words of Hobbes, "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." The disregard of another class will probably lead to a more precarious existence, or one less rich in the experiences which make up life; while opposition to a third class, so far from being hurtful or dangerous, may remove unnecessary restrictions, and aid the development both of the individual and of society. He may accordingly look upon these 'intuitions' as having the force of hypothetical imperatives in relation to ends which themselves possess different degrees of social utility.

(b) There is a second point which will also be recognised by the evolutionist. Although these intuitions have been derived, they are now organic, and their disappearance from the human mind as instinctive tendencies towards or against action can only be slow and painful. The process must involve a certain amount of loss, and the loss as well as the gain must be entered in the account. At the same time, it is not a process that can be easily avoided. As soon as the reason of the instinctive tendency is enquired into, its force as instinct is weakened. We pass from the action itself to the end it is fitted to subserve; and, if the instinctive action is not the most appropriate, or has hurtful results, we have

(b) their  
organic  
character.

already reached the stage in which the instinct is checked, and begins to yield to action directed by a principle. Yet it dies out only gradually and after a struggle. Nor does it seem possible to assert with confidence, as mitigating this struggle, that the strongest impulses will always be those which are necessary or advantageous to the existence of society. For it is a common experience that the moral intuitions which lead to conduct that has ceased to serve a purpose, and the internal sanctions which follow disregard of them, are often even more powerful than those which protect such virtues as justice or veracity.

Resultant  
attitude of  
evolution-  
ism to intui-  
tionism.

From the preceding argument it follows that it cannot be held that moral intuitions are invalid because evolved. The evolutionist will certainly go very far wrong, as Sidgwick points out, if he maintains that a "general demonstration of the derivedness or developedness of our moral faculty can supply an adequate reason for distrusting it." Instead of holding that, if we succeed in tracing the origin of an intuition, it is thereby discredited, he will admit that the mere fact of our possessing any moral intuition shows that the habits of action from which it was derived have been permanent enough to leave their traces on the mental structure, and that the conduct to which it leads, like the custom from which it came, will not destroy society, but, on the contrary, will probably tend to

its permanence. The general attitude of the evolution-theory to moral intuitions is therefore, after all, very similar to that which Sidgwick has reached as a result of his elaborate examination of the maxims of common-sense. It is an attitude of trust tempered by criticism. In both an appeal is made from the axioms themselves: in the one case, to their historical genesis and the institutions in which they originated; in the other, to the searching test of logical consistency, and their capability of being applied to conduct. But the theory of evolution, if it succeeds in tracing the origin of our moral intuitions, does seem to involve the abandonment of the old intuitional method which accepted them as rules of conduct from which no appeal could be taken.

The theory of evolution transforms intuitionism by the way in which it connects the individual with the race. Its first effect upon egoism is similar. The nature of the individual man as now exhibited is widely different from that which the older individualistic theory used to deal with. The latter is typified by the marble statue to which Condillac<sup>1</sup> compares the percipient subject, as yet unaffected by sense-impressions. The variety of mental life which is actually met with is accounted for by the different kinds of experiences different

2. Bearing of the theory of evolution on egoism.

<sup>1</sup> *Traité des sensations*, Œuvres (1798), vol. iii.

men pass through; and the consequent difference in the sources of pleasure and pain accounts for the diverse lines of activity which human beings follow out. But the theory of evolution shows that human nature is infinitely varied, not only through the variety of circumstances, but through the variety of inherited dispositions. One individual is not merely connected with others through considerable similarity of experience built upon an equally characterless basis; but he is organically related to all the members of the race, not only bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh, but mind of their mind. He is connected with others by a thousand subtly interwoven threads of emotion which enter into his life, and unite his desires and activities with the functions of the larger organism of which he is a member.

Relation of  
egoism to  
altruism  
as affected  
by it :  
(a) social  
nature of the  
individual,

The theory of evolution has thus an important contribution to make to the question of the relation between egoism and altruism. It has remained for it to show historically how the individual is so connected with the community that the good, or the pleasure, of the one cannot be considered apart from that of the other. From the non-evolutionist point of view it was always open to show how the individual depended on society, how his wants could only be supplied by it, and how the security and happiness of every one were bound up with those of his fellows. The individualistic theory

was thus able to give all sorts of egoistic reasons why people should indulge in what is now called altruistic conduct. Self was seen to be 'a poor centre for a man's actions,' and only chosen by the short-sighted person, who thereby missed both the good to himself that followed from his neighbours' wellbeing, and the peculiar pleasure of sympathy and benevolent action. But the theory of evolution has shown how the two things have developed together in the race: first, actual solidarity between the individual and the whole; and secondly, the subjective reflexion of the same fact, sympathy with the feelings of others. When we ask, therefore, whether it is our own pleasure (or good) or that of others that we ought to aim at, our attention is directed to the gradual obliteration of the distinction between the interest and feelings of the individual and those of the whole. Were this completely accomplished, there need be no more question about the matter. If conduct with an egoistic motive or aim always resulted in altruistic equally with egoistic effects, and if altruistic conduct had always egoistic equally with altruistic consequences, it would even then be little more than vain subtlety to ask whether egoism or altruism was to be the real end of conduct. But if, in addition to the identity of interests, there were also an identity of motive or feeling, the question would be no longer in place at all. For there would cease to be either

but not  
completely  
social.

a subjective distinction in motive between egoism and altruism, or an objective distinction in the courses of conduct to which they led. And it is just because this identification is manifestly incomplete—because neither the interests nor the desires of the individual harmonise with any degree of exactness with those of his fellows—that we must examine how far the conception of the social organism put forward in the theory of evolution is a true expression for the condition of individuals.

Difference  
between the  
individual  
and social  
organisms

At most, the theory of organic evolution can make out that there is a tendency towards the identification of the interests of the individual with those of society. It cannot demonstrate a complete identification. The community has indeed been called an organism, and the individual spoken of as a cell in the tissue of which it is composed; but we must avoid pressing this analogy to the point of breaking. Among so many points of similarity between society and an individual organism, there is one essential distinction,—the social organism has no feelings and thoughts but those of its individual members—the conscious centre is in the unit, not in the whole; whereas, when we regard the individual organism and its constituent members, consciousness is seen to exist only in the whole, not in each several unit. The absence of a “social sensorium”<sup>1</sup> should, therefore,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, i. 479.

make us hesitate to identify the ends of individual with those of collective action; for, to a certain extent, the individual can distinguish his own interests from those of the society, and prefer the former: so that the organic unity is incomplete. Every cell in the individual body has a life-history of its own, besides partaking of the life of the organism; and, did it possess the reason which 'looks before and after,' it also might conceivably adopt an egoistic attitude, and object to the subordination of its private interests to the good of the whole. In the same way, the many individual lives which make up the social organism—since each of them possesses a separate consciousness—are apt to disregard the life of the larger whole whose members they are. Now what the theory of utilitarianism requires is, that the happiness or pleasurable consciousness of men in general, and not of the individual agent, be made the end; and those who make egoism the moral standard, commonly maintain that the general happiness is the end of politics.<sup>1</sup> The individual is not indeed required to be entirely unselfish or 'altruistic' in action. He is not altogether forbidden to seek his own things, nor enjoined to seek the things of others; and evolutionist utilitarianism, if it would tell him to seek his own happiness in the happiness of the community. But the obvious

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Barratt, "Ethics and Politics"—Mind, O.S., ii. 453 ff.

remark must be borne in mind, that society, the social organism, cannot experience happiness. However it may resemble the individual organism in the manner of its growth, the modes of its activity, and even its relation to its component members, yet it cannot feel pleasure or pain as an individual does. The 'happiness of the community' does not mean the happiness of the social organism, but is only a concise formula for the aggregate happinesses of the individuals composing it.

in respect  
of feeling.

When it is said, therefore—either as a political or an ethical theory—that the happiness of society is the end for conduct, the end prescribed is altruistic rather than social. Its object is not an organism, but an aggregate of individuals. A certain organisation of society may lead to an increase in this aggregate happiness, and so be necessary for the attainment of the end; but if the end is happiness, the social organism and its wellbeing are no longer the thing cared for, but the greatest aggregate of pleasures on the part of its members.

So long, therefore, as the end is pleasure, it must have reference to individuals. The utilitarian may try to ~~per~~<sup>per</sup>suade the agent to seek the pleasures of others as if they were his own—requiring him thus to seek his end out of himself and the circle of his own pleasures. And, while we continue to hold pleasure to be the end, the evolution-theory



can go no further than this. It seemed to have made out an organic unity between different individuals, through which it might be possible to effect a reconciliation between the rival ethical principles of egoism and altruism. But the feeling of pleasure is just the point where individualism is strongest, and in regard to which mankind, instead of being an organism in which each part only subserves the purposes of the whole, must rather be regarded as a collection of competing and co-operating units.

It is true that the social factor in the individual life is brought into scientific cognisance by the theory of evolution. This theory shows the way in which a man's interests and feelings depend upon others. And if, through the influence of a political standpoint, or of some intuition of reason, a universalistic ethics has been already arrived at, it can bring forward the organic union of individual and society as a means of enforcing the social end upon the individual agent. In this way the theory of evolution makes a contribution to ethics at a critical point where the individualistic theory failed. For ethics must not rest content with pointing out an end for conduct or standard of morality without giving a reason to the individual why he should make this end his own—that is, developing a doctrine of obligation. In many current theories, notably in the common forms of

Theory of obligation simplified, if universalistic end arrived at.

utilitarianism, the two things are not necessarily connected, since the standard is fixed from the point of view of the whole, and obligation has reference to the individual. The development of morality may appear to show how the two stand-points can be connected. If it could be made out that the happiness of the community and of the individual are identical, a standard of morality which made the aggregate happiness the end might be regarded as carrying its own obligation within itself: politics and ethics would (on the hedonistic theory) be harmonised. And, in so far as evolution has brought the individual and society into closer reciprocal dependence, it has lessened the practical difficulty of bringing about this conciliation, or—to speak with the utilitarians—of making the standard of morality supply a doctrine of obligation. At present, however, the course of human development is far from having reached the point at which actual harmony between the race and each member of it is established; and it would therefore still be a subject for enquiry whether the theory of evolution could provide a basis for moral obligation, even were the moral standard or the end for conduct satisfactorily established. But, in determining this latter question, we find that the above psychological and sociological investigations have no longer the same degree of value as before. In the theory of obligation every fact brought for-

ward by evolution to show the harmony of individual and social welfare makes the way easier for establishing the reasonableness of the pursuit of social ends by the individual. But from these facts of past development we have also to determine a standard for present and future action. And this question cannot be solved merely by showing how morality has developed, though that development may form an important part of the evidence from which our conclusions are to be drawn.

The harmony of interests and the harmony of feelings required for the empirical reconciliation of egoism and altruism are of such a kind that they need only to be stated to show how far they are from being realised in present circumstances. The constant struggle involved in the course of evolution throws doubt even on its ultimate attainment. The rule has always been that the better-equipped organism asserts and maintains its supremacy only by vanquishing the organisms which are not so well equipped. Conflict and competition have been constant factors in development. The present circumstances of the individual have been determined for him by the war of hostile interests between different communities, and between different members of the same community; and his mental inheritance has been largely formed by the emotions corresponding to this rivalry. Perhaps the neces-

(b) Limits to complete conciliation of egoism and altruism :

(a) continued existence of competition between individuals;

sity for conflict has diminished with the advance of evolution; but it is probable that it would be more correct to say that its forms have changed. At any rate, it is still sufficiently great to make competition one of the chief formative influences in industrial and political life. And the causes from which the struggle of interests arises are so constant—the multiplication of desires and of desiring individuals keeps so well in advance of the means of satisfying desires—that it is doubtful whether the course of evolution is fitted to bring about complete harmony between different individuals. It would almost seem that the ‘moving equilibrium’ in human conduct, in which there is no clash of diverse interests, cannot be expected to be brought about much before the time when the physical factors of the universe shall have reached the stage in which life ends.

( $\beta$ ) different  
and conflict-  
ing degrees  
of altruism;

Besides, it does not do to speak as if the only alternative to egoism were a comprehensive altruism. Man is a member of a family, a tribe, a nation, the race. His altruism, therefore, may take the narrow form of family feeling, or it may extend to tribal feeling, or to patriotism, or even rise to devotion to humanity. And these do not merely supplement one another; they are often conflicting principles of conduct. Action for the sake of the family may frequently be most unsocial; the keen patriot ignores the rights of other peoples;

the 'citizen of the world' is too often a stranger to the national spirit. Further, when civilisation grows complex, the same man is a member of many intersecting societies—a church, a trade, a party organisation<sup>1</sup>—and has to balance the claims which each of these has upon him. The suppression of egoism would still leave undetermined the different shares which these various social wholes are to have in a man's sympathies, and their different claims upon his conduct.

Any theory of society will show how the good of the individual is not merely a part of the good of the whole, but reacts in various ways upon the organism of which he is a member. But, in the case of any one individual, the results of acts done for his own good (or pleasure), and the results of those done for the good (or pleasure) of the whole, do not correspond with any exactness, and often widely diverge. If, then, the individual is consciously aiming at his own good (or pleasure), it is—if we look from the point of view of individualistic ethics—only an incidental and fortuitous result of the action when it promotes the common good. When we recognise the social factor in the individual, this judgment must be modified. The evolution-theory shows how he has become so constituted that much that pleases him individually, must of necessity benefit society at large.

(γ) the altruism of interest and the altruism of motive

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Stephen, *Science of Ethics*, p. 113.

But there are obvious limits to the harmony. The pleasure or interest of the individual is often the reverse of advantageous to society. It may be the case that in seeking his own private ends, he is yet, to use the words of Adam Smith, "led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention."<sup>1</sup> But, if so, the end is invisible as well as the hand that points to it. And the good of society can be said to be the natural and uniform consequence of the individual's action, only when he consciously makes it his end. In a word, the true altruism—or, as we might call it, using a word appropriated to another purpose—the true socialism is when the good of others or of society is pursued for its own sake; and this is to be distinguished from the false or imperfect altruism, in which the same outward result is aimed at, because it is seen to be the most prudent way of promoting one's own good. Thus Spencer's elaborate argument<sup>2</sup> to show that conduct of purely egoistic tendency, equally with conduct of purely altruistic tendency, is insufficient and self-destructive, does not reach beyond the external results of action, and leaves it possible for both end and motive to be still egoistic. If "morality is internal,"<sup>3</sup> the discussion proves no ethical proposi-

<sup>1</sup> *Wealth of Nations*, book iv. ch. ii.

<sup>2</sup> *Principles of Ethics*, part i. chap. xiii.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen, *Science of Ethics*, p. 155; cf. Spencer, *Principles of Ethics*, i. 120.

tion at all. The simplest form of selfishness may indeed be transcended by recognising that the pleasures and pains of others are sources of sympathetic feeling in ourselves. But a subjective or emotional egoism remains. And if the fact that we "receive pleasure from the pleasure of another man"<sup>1</sup> is our reason for seeking his pleasure, we shall cease to seek it when a means of greater pleasure offers. In human life as at present constituted, no secure principle of conduct can be based on the agreement of individual with social good; for, if they diverge, as they often do, there is no standard left for determining their competing claims.

It will not do to divide all men, as Stephen seems to do,<sup>2</sup> into two classes, typified by the reasonable and therefore sympathetic man who has struck a bargain with society to take 'common stock of pains and pleasures,' and the systematically selfish man who 'must be an idiot.' For most men belong to neither of those two classes: their bargain with society has not been fully completed, and can be withdrawn from temporarily when circumstances make withdrawal convenient, though this process cannot be carried on indefinitely without greatly weakening the sympathetic feelings. The majority of men are neither entirely sym-

(8) altruistic feelings in-completely established,

<sup>1</sup> Stephen, *Science of Ethics*, p. 226.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

thetic nor yet 'systematically selfish': they are unsystematically sympathetic and unsystematically selfish. Such men have the sensibilities that give 'leverage' to the moralist.<sup>1</sup> But it is futile to tell them to be more sympathetic, or entirely sympathetic. For sympathetic feelings cannot be produced at will: they can only come with that slow modification of the character brought about by conduct. Shall we then say that a man should in all cases of conduct prefer the pleasure of the whole or of others to his own pleasure? If a man were to do so, then, perhaps, by consistent self-abnegation, altruism might become pleasant, and both the man himself and his descendants become more sympathetically constituted. This perfection of altruistic sympathies is looked forward to by Spencer as characteristic of a subsequent—the final—stage of evolution. When that period comes, men will compete with one another for the few remaining opportunities of self-sacrifice.<sup>2</sup> At present, Spencer argues, pure altruism is suicidal. The individual whose sympathetic nature is undeveloped may, however, go further, and ask what right we have to say that "the moral law" is "conformity to the conditions of social welfare,"<sup>3</sup> rather than to those of individual welfare. Evolution, it would seem, does not suffice to prove

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Science of Ethics*, p. 442.

<sup>2</sup> *Principles of Ethics*, i. 253.

<sup>3</sup> *Science of Ethics*, p. 349.



this proposition, which appears, on the contrary, to be a survival of the social or political way of looking at things inherited from the utilitarian theory. The point to be proved is why I ought to adopt this standpoint when considering what the end of my action is to be. And this point stands in need of proof here as much as in utilitarianism, and seems almost equally destitute of it.

Feelings leading to altruistic conduct are undoubtedly possessed by the average man at his present stage of development. Yet the being who is able to reflect on the feelings possessed by him, and compare the characteristics of different emotional states, and the activities following from them, has already before him the possibility of transcending them. He is able to estimate their value in terms of simpler—or of other—feelings; and the man who rigorously judges them by the test of personal pleasure and pain manifests the spirit of the egoistic hedonist—a spirit which the theory of empirical evolution does not seem able to exercise.

At the same time the *tendency* of the evolution-theory is not to support but to supplant egoism. Neither the basis of psychological hedonism on which egoism is usually made to rest, nor the independent arguments which have been urged for its ethical theory, are drawn from the facts of development. The theory of evolution may, in-

and may be  
restrained  
by reflexion.

(c) Tendency of evolution to supplant egoism. Evolution not the basis of psychological hedonism,

deed, be made to suggest that non-hedonistic action has arisen out of hedonistic: "That all affections are generated by association with experienced pleasure—only that the association is mainly *ancestral* in the case of 'affections' proper. The dim remembrance of ancestral pleasures, the force of ancestral habit, produces that propension of which Butler speaks, disproportionate to (distinct) expectation and (personal) experience of pleasure."<sup>1</sup> But this view will be rejected by the pure egoist,<sup>2</sup> who must maintain that the pain of acting against ancestral habit would in every case be greater than the expected pleasure forgone by following it. According to the view suggested, all deliberate volition would still be regarded as hedonistically determined, though other motives than pleasure might affect action through having been inherited from cases of ancestral conduct in which they tended to personal pleasure. Even were it shown, however, that altruistic conduct has been developed out of egoistic, the fact of its development would not alter its present character. If action now is not always moved by pleasure and pain alone, it becomes a question of merely historical interest to trace its genesis to conduct to which our ancestors were hedonistically im-

<sup>1</sup> F. Y. Edgeworth, *Old and New Methods of Ethics* (1877), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. Barratt, *Mind*, O.S., iii. 280.

pelled. The fact remains that the original simplicity of motive has been broken into, and something else than personal pleasure admitted to have sway.

But it does not seem to have been made out that action in the early stages of human life was completely egoistic, any more than that it is so now. "From first to last," as Spencer put it,<sup>1</sup> self-sacrifice seems to have been involved in the preservation of each successive generation of individuals. We inherit propensities to action which have been evolved from an initial stage in which there was no conscious distinction between egoism and altruism, though both tendencies were present and were necessary for the continued existence of the species. The feelings inherited by the egoistic hedonist are assessed by him at their pleasure-value. But such feelings would never have been acquired by his ancestors, had they tested each germinal emotion in the same way, and so restrained self-sacrifice for offspring and fellow-men. Perhaps they did not clearly see or realise what their pleasure consisted in, or accurately distinguish it from family or tribal welfare; but, through this deficiency of imagination, the feelings were able to grow and perpetuate themselves, which have tended to the preservation and consolidation of society.

Nor can we gather from evolution any ethical

<sup>1</sup> Principles of Ethics, part i. chap. xii.

nor of  
ethical  
hedonism.

argument leading to egoism as the standard of worth in conduct. The proof of egoism attempted by the late Mr Barratt, for instance, is unaffected by his recognition of the theory of evolution as applied to mind, and depends on definitions and axioms which hold (if at all) for the individual man. Pleasure is defined by him as "that state of consciousness which follows upon the unimpeded performance (as such) of its function by one or more of the parts of our organism";<sup>1</sup> and the good is forthwith identified with pleasure, by its being shown that it is a "state of consciousness," and that it "results from the due performance of function (as such)."<sup>2</sup> But the 'due<sup>3</sup> performance of function' is itself a state or states of consciousness; and in it, not in any sequent or concomitant circumstances, the good may consist. The good, it may be said, is not pleasure, but the activity of which pleasure is only the consequent and completion. This is not a mere question of words. For 'due performance of function' cannot be measured by the resultant or accompanying feeling of pleasure: the most perfect functioning, just because it has become habitual, has often the slightest accompaniment of pleasant feeling. The way in which

<sup>1</sup> Physical Ethics, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> In the word 'due' an idea of worth is involved. Probably Barratt meant by 'due performance' one which made the faculty correspond with its medium (cf. Physical Ethics, p. 9); but this introduces a new standard of value.

the argument is put in 'Physical Ethics' is thus well fitted to bring out the fundamental antithesis between ethical systems according as they place the good in the active element of function, or in the passive element of pleasurable feeling which accompanies functioning. The theory of evolution seems to have led many of the writers who have applied it to ethics to the other side of the antithesis than that adhered to by Barratt. They recognise ethical value as belonging to 'due performance of function,' rather than to the pleased states of consciousness which follow; and in this way their theory leads them beyond hedonistic ethics.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The transition involved in passing from 'pleasure' to 'performance of function' or 'life' as the end of conduct, may be illustrated by the following passage from Mr Pater's 'Marius the Epicurean' (1885, i. 163): "Really, to the 'phase of reflection through which Marius was then passing, the charge of 'hedonism,' whatever its real weight might be, was not properly applicable to all. Not pleasure, but fulness of life, and 'insight' as conducting to that fulness—energy, choice and variety of experience—including noble pain and sorrow even—loves such as those in the exquisite old story of Apuleius; such sincere and strenuous forms of the moral life, as Seneca and Epictetus—whatever form of human life, in short, was impassioned and ideal: it was from this that the 'new Cyrenaicism' of Marius took its criterion of values. It was a theory, indeed, which might rightly be regarded as in a great degree coincident with the main principle of the Stoics themselves, and a version of the precept 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might'—a doctrine so widely applicable among the nobler spirits of that time; and as with that its mistaken tendency would lie in the direction of a kind of idolatry of mere life, or natural gift or strength—*l'idolâtrie des talents*."

3. Bearing  
of the theory  
of evolution  
on utilitari-  
anism

It has been argued that the theory of evolution is, in tendency, hostile to the egoistic principle. Had egoism been consistently recognised and acted upon during the course of human development, the features of social life which most promote co-operation and progress would never have become persistent. But the same objection cannot be urged against universalistic hedonism. It is true that this has not been the end consistently aimed at in the past. Those from whom our social instincts are inherited cannot be credited with having had either the general happiness or social evolution in view. Society and institutions furthering the common good were not the work of primitive utilitarians plotting for the greatest happiness of the greatest number. They have come down to us from times when social organisation was forced upon men by the rude logic of facts which exterminated tribes in which the bond of union was weak; and they have been gradually modified by the pressure of external circumstances and the growing influence of mental conceptions of what is best. But the adoption of general happiness as the end of action would not have had the same effect on social evolution as the adoption of personal happiness as the end would have had. It would have aided and would not have hindered the growth of the feeling of unity among the members of a tribe or state, as well as have led

to the recognition of the individual as subordinate to the social organism. It may thus seem quite natural to look to utilitarianism as giving the end for reflective action, and yet to hold along with it what is loosely called the 'ethics of evolution.'

But this first attitude of evolution to utilitarian-ism was not fitted to be permanent; and the 'start'<sup>1</sup> Spencer got on being classed with anti-utilitarians must have been repeated in the experience of other moralists as they found how far they had drifted from their ancient moorings. Spencer's difference from the utilitarian was not such as to lead him to reject or modify their principle. He maintained, as strongly as they did that "the ultimately supreme end" is "happiness special and general."<sup>2</sup> But he disagreed with them in method: holding in me that, owing to the incommensurability of a man's different pleasures and pains, and to the incommensurability of the pleasures and pains of one man with those of others, coupled with the indeterminateness of the means required to reach so indeterminate an end, happiness is not fitted to be the immediate aim of conduct.<sup>3</sup> But another method

<sup>1</sup> "The note in question greatly startled me by implicitly classing me with anti-utilitarians. I have never regarded myself as an anti-utilitarian."—Spencer's letter to J. S. Mill, quoted in Bain's *Mental and Moral Science*, p. 721, and printed in full in Spencer's *Autobiography*, ii. 88 f.

<sup>2</sup> *Principles of Ethics*, i. 173; cf. p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, i. 154, 155.

(he thought) is open to us. For "since evolution has been, and is still, working towards the highest life, it follows that conforming to those principles by which the highest life is achieved, is furthering that end."<sup>1</sup> It is possible "to deduce, from the laws of life and the conditions of existence, what kinds of action necessarily tend to produce happiness, and what kinds to produce unhappiness."<sup>2</sup> Greatest pleasure, that is to say, is the end. But it is so impossible to compare different kinds of pleasure, different people's pleasure, and different means for obtaining a maximum of it, that it is not a practical end for aiming at. No doubt is expressed that greatest happiness is the ultimate end; although no good reason is given for holding that it is. But it is an indeterminate end, and needs to be interpreted by the course of evolution which is held to tend to it. It is not too much to say, therefore, that Spencer was only nominally a utilitarian. His ethical principles were not arrived at by an estimate of the consequences of action, but by deduction from the laws of that 'highest life' which is now in process of evolution. This alliance between evolutionism and hedonism will be examined in the following chapter. At present it is necessary to consider the reasons which have led other evolutionists to

<sup>1</sup> *Principles of Ethics*, i. 171.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to J. S. Mill, in *Principles of Ethics*, i. 57.



look upon the new morality as superseding the utilitarian end.

Spencer's "dissent from the doctrine of utility, as commonly understood, concerns," he tells us,<sup>1</sup> "not the object to be reached by men, but the method of reaching it." With other writers, however, the theory of evolution has not only supplanted the method of utilitarianism, but also led to a modification of its principle. The objections they have taken to it may perhaps be summed up by saying that they consider utilitarianism to have looked upon conduct from a mechanical, instead of from an organic point of view. It prescribed conduct to a man as if he were a machine with a certain kind and quantity of work to turn out. His nature was looked upon by it as fixed, and his social conditions as unvarying; and the ideal set before him was therefore unprogressive—something that he was to do or to get, not something that he was to become. According to Stephen, it "considers society to be formed of an aggregate of similar human beings. The character of each molecule is regarded as constant." It can, therefore, give a test which is 'approximately accurate' only, which does not allow for the variation of character and of social relations."<sup>2</sup> To the same

and in  
principle.

(a) Ideal of  
utilitarian-  
ism objected  
to as unpro-  
gressive.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to J. S. Mill, in Bain's *Mental and Moral Science*, p. 721, Spencer's *Autobiography*, ii. 88.

<sup>2</sup> *Science of Ethics*, p. 363.

effect Miss Simcox maintained that it "might pass muster in a theory of social statics, but it breaks down altogether if we seek its help to construct a theory of social dynamics."<sup>1</sup> These writers do not seem to have made it quite clear, however, in what way utilitarianism assumes a stationary condition of human nature, and so formulates conduct in a way unsuited to a progressive state. To say simply that the greatest happiness of the greatest number is the end, is not in itself inconsistent with a progressive state of human nature. It is true that, in all the enthusiasm for and belief in progress to be seen in a writer such as J. S. Mill, there is a constant goal always set to it in the possible maximum of pleasant feeling. It would not have been inconsistent for him, however, to look upon human nature as capable of developing new susceptibilities for pleasure. Progress is made by increasing the amount of pleasure actually got. And so far the ideal itself is certainly fixed, while progress consists in its gradual realisation. But there is no special virtue in having an ideal which is itself progressive. A progressive ideal simply means an ideal which is incompletely comprehended, and the comprehension of which proceeds gradually with its realisation. At any time the definition of such an ideal can only be tentative: with the actual assimilation of character to it, the intellect comes

<sup>1</sup> *Natural Law : An Essay in Ethics* (1877), p. 101.

to grasp its nature with increasing clearness. I do not myself think that we can expect to have more than such a tentative and progressive comprehension of the moral ideal of humanity. But we must not take objection to a theory because it gives at once a clear and definite view of the final end of conduct: though we must not refrain from enquiring how the end is known.

But the bearing of the objection to utilitarianism becomes apparent when we try to give some definite meaning to the end 'greatest happiness.' If we are content to receive it as simply a very general—or rather abstract—expression for our ideal, nothing need be said, except to put the question, which has been already asked, how we came by such an ideal. The difficulty arises when we attempt to apply the ideal to practice. With men of fixed character in an unchanging society, our way might be comparatively clear. But, when both character and social relations vary, and their variation extends to susceptibility to pleasure and pain, and depends on the actions adopted to obtain the end, utilitarianism may well appear to be without a principle by which to determine between different kinds of conduct. To an objection similar to this, but taken from the old point of view, that we have no time before acting to sum up the pleasurable and painful consequences of our actions, Mill replied that there had been "ample time—namely, the whole past

Force of the  
objection  
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by showing  
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which men  
can obtain  
happiness,

duration of the human species"<sup>1</sup>—in which to estimate the felicific results of conduct. The variability of faculty and function makes this answer lack convincing power. Yet, perhaps, we are apt at present to disregard the real value of this collective experience of the race. True, human nature is not a constant; but certain of its qualities are persistent and constant enough not to leave us in doubt as to whether, say, murder and theft are beneficial or injurious to happiness. There are at least certain actions, and, still more, certain abstinences, upon which human security—the basis of happiness—depends: though it would seem that those 'secondary laws' may be more properly regarded as conditions of life than means to pleasure.

and a maximum of it.

The difficulty, however, comes most clearly to the front when we attempt to define the maximum of happiness, and that not for an individual or generation only, but for the race. It is not happiness merely, but greatest happiness, that is the utilitarian end. Is there any way, then, of determining how the maximum of happiness is to be obtained for generations whose characters, though inherited from present individuals, may be modified almost indefinitely? The very existence and numbers of these future generations are problematic; and Mill, as is well known, spent much of his

<sup>1</sup> Utilitarianism, p. 34.

energy in trying to induce the present generation to restrict the numbers of the next. But he never seems to have asked the question whether the true end was greatest average happiness or greatest aggregate happiness; and either alternative would have led to paradox. Even on the fundamental question as to whether happiness is to be obtained by the restriction of desires or by the satisfaction which leads to their recurrence and increase, no principle can be extracted from utilitarian ethics. The theory of evolution has shown how desires may be uprooted in the character of the race, though they remain to the end in existing individuals; but in each case utilitarianism would require us to sum up and estimate the relative advantages of renunciation and satisfaction—a task which the modifiability of human character seems to make impossible. Thus, even if certain rules of living may be ascertained, and justified by the utilitarian principle, it would seem that the end of greatest happiness for the race of man, or the sentient creation generally, must remain ‘abstract.’ There seems no principle through which it may be applied to conduct—no hope of an accurate estimate of results—when the variability of the individual and of social relations is taken into account.

Connected with this is the assertion that morality must have an inward, not an external standard. (b) Objection to utilitarianism as a

theory of  
conse-  
quences ;

The evolutionists are inclined to condemn utilitarianism as a theory of consequences, dealing solely with work produced. According to Mill, "utilitarian moralists have gone beyond almost all others in affirming that the motive has nothing to do with the morality of the action, though much with the worth of the agent."<sup>1</sup> And this seems to be just what evolutionism objects to. Even the worth of the agent is, according to utilitarianism, only a tendency to perform the actions called moral: "a good or a bad disposition" is said to be "a bent of character from which useful or from which hurtful actions are likely to arise."<sup>2</sup> Against this view Stephen maintained that "the attempt to secure an absolute and immutable moral law in its external shape must be illusory. The moral law can be stated unconditionally when it is stated in the form 'Be this,' but not when it is stated in the form 'Do this.'"<sup>3</sup> This, however, appears to express the matter in a way not free from difficulty. The organic view of conduct will object not only to considering action apart from character, but also to considering character apart from action. We must treat conduct as a whole: and, in order to do so, we must treat it as both arising out of and forming character; and we must treat character not as mere potentiality, but as it realises itself in conduct. The weakness of

<sup>1</sup> Utilitarianism, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 27 n.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen, Science of Ethics, p. 385.

the utilitarian theory is its method of regarding actions merely for the sake of their results: the evolutionist must show how results are connected with motives,—how character and conduct are different aspects of a whole.

The difference of the evolutionist view from utilitarianism comes out at another point. The latter places the standard and test of conduct in its effects on the sensibility. The best is that which brings most pleasure. Utilitarians are now, for the most part, ready to admit that, to be in earnest with their theory, they must reject Mill's attempt to distinguish qualities among pleasures. "If morality is to be defined by happiness, we must, of course, allow all kinds of happiness to count, and to count equally so far as they are actually equal. We must reckon the pleasures of malevolence as well as those of benevolence."<sup>1</sup> Of his own pleasures—of the relative amounts of pleasure he gets from various sources—each man is the final judge. One man prefers 'push-pin' to poetry, another poetry to 'push-pin'; and neither has a right to call the other mistaken. If we are to aim at the greatest maximum pleasure, therefore, we must not strive for what are commonly called 'high' pleasures rather than 'low' pleasures, except as greater in intensity. If we must have a standard, the judgment of the men of experience for which Mill contended must be

(e) and as related solely to sensibility,

<sup>1</sup> Stephen, *Science of Ethics*, p. 361.

of which  
there is no  
common  
measure.

superseded by the judgment of the average man. If pleasure is the only end, and satisfaction is simply another name for it, then it is plainly incorrect to say that "it is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied."<sup>1</sup> As has been urged from the evolutionist point of view, "there is no common measure of happiness to enable us to say that the more perfect being enjoys more of it than the less."<sup>2</sup> There seems one way only in which utilitarianism can bring its moral ideal into harmony with the upward tendency claimed for itself by evolutionist ethics—and that is, by maintaining that the pleasures incident to what are regarded as the higher functions are the pleasures which excel others in respect of 'fecundity': they are the source of future pleasures, and are frequently inclusive even in their present enjoyment. The difficulty in making this assertion is just that these 'higher' pleasures are but slightly appreciated by the majority of men, and can hardly be said to be pleasures for them at all. But here the theory of evolution, whose adherents have been acting the part of the candid friend to utilitarianism, must come to its aid, and admit that human nature may be so modified in the future as to allow of the 'highest' becoming also the 'greatest' of pleasures. The argument in the mouth of the utili-

<sup>1</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 14.      <sup>2</sup> Simcox, *Natural Law*, p. 101.



tarian is perhaps a somewhat arbitrary one, since it could be applied equally well to any class of pleasures. The notion of 'higher,' as applied either to conduct or to pleasure, has been accepted from current moral opinion. But the theory of evolution has set itself to explain this notion, and to develop a theory of morality in harmony with its own scientific positions, and free from the defects which it has found in other systems. How far it contributes to the determination of the ethical end or standard of worth in conduct will form the subject of investigation in the following chapters.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## HEDONISM AND EVOLUTIONISM.

1. Alliance  
of evolu-  
tionism and  
hedonism  
effected in  
two ways.

THE alliance between Evolutionism and Hedonism may be arrived at from either of the two points of view which are being brought into connexion: may be either an attempt to bring the hedonistic standard into the definite region of law revealed by the evolution of life; or may result from the endeavour to give clearness and persuasiveness to an ethical standard which evolution itself seems to point to.

(a) greatest  
happiness to  
be obtained  
by conform-  
ing to laws  
of life or of  
evolution;

The former point of view is represented by Spencer's rejection of empirical utilitarianism, and substitution for it of a practical end which is not enunciated in terms of pleasure. Happiness is still regarded by him as the supreme end; but the tendency to it is not to be adopted as the end in practical morality. There are certain conditions of social equilibrium which "must be fulfilled before complete life—that is, greatest happiness—can be obtained in any society."<sup>1</sup> Thus the form

<sup>1</sup> Data of Ethics, p. 171.

of 'rational utilitarianism' which he endeavours to establish "does not take welfare for its immediate object of pursuit," but "conformity to certain principles which, in the nature of things, causally determine welfare."<sup>1</sup> Having deduced "from the laws of life and the conditions of existence what kinds of action necessarily tend to produce happiness, and what kinds to produce unhappiness," we are to recognise these deductions "as laws of conduct . . . irrespective of a direct estimation of happiness or misery."<sup>2</sup> The assumption is thus distinctly made that life tends to happiness, and that the laws of its evolution yield practical principles by following out which the greatest happiness may be obtained, without attempting the impossible task of estimating directly the felicific and infelicitic results of conduct.

Starting from the evolutionist point of view, but with an opposite estimate of the relative value for practice of the ends supplied by evolutionism and by hedonism, a like identification of them might seem advisable. The 'increase of life' to which evolution tends may be regarded as not merely an account of the actual process of existence, but as a principle of action for a conscious being. In this way some such ethical imperative as "Be a self-conscious agent in the evolution of the universe"<sup>3</sup>

(/) ethical  
end of  
evolution  
interpreted  
by pleasure.

<sup>1</sup> Principles of Ethics, i. 162.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., i. 57.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. Barratt, in *Mind*, O.S., ii. 172 n.

may be formulated. Yet as the 'evolution of the universe' is a somewhat large conception, and its laws are not clear to every one, it may seem necessary that the end should be explained by translation into better-known terms. And this may be done if the conduct which promotes life most is, at the same time, the conduct which increases pleasure most. In this way, although the ultimate end is life, or, in vaster phrase, 'the evolution of the universe,' the practical end is pleasure. The moral value of conduct will depend on its tendency to increase the balance of pleasure over pain. The ethics of evolution will be reduced to hedonism.

This way of determining the evolutionist end is put forward as a logical possibility rather than as representing the views of any party. Yet it would seem that the above point of view is not altogether foreign to evolutionist morality. The preservation or development of the individual—or of the race—which is put forward as an expression both for the actual course of evolution and the subjective impulse corresponding to it, is often assumed to agree at each step with the desire for pleasure, and, when the stage of reflective consciousness is reached, to be identical with the pursuit of a maximum of pleasure.<sup>1</sup> In this way it is assumed that the

<sup>1</sup> As illustrating this, I may refer to G. v. Giżycki, *Philosophische Consequenzen der Lamarck-Darwin'schen Entwicklungs-*

preservation and development of life tend always to pleasure, and that the end or tendency of evolution is being fulfilled when the greatest pleasure is wisely sought. It is therefore necessary to enquire how far the correspondence between life and pleasure, or between development and pleasure, actually holds, that we may see whether it is possible for the one to take the place of the other in determining the end for conduct.

Now it is argued, from the point of view of evolution, that, taking for granted that pleasure motives action, the organisms in which pleasurable acts coincided with life-preserving or health-promoting acts must have survived in the struggle for existence at the expense of those organisms whose pleasurable activity tended to their destruction or

2. Evolutionist argument for concomitance of life and pleasure.

theorie (1876), p. 27 : "Wir haben oben die Erhaltung und Forderung des Lebens des Individuums und der Gattung als das eine Ziel der Einrichtung des geistigen Organismus gekennzeichnet." P. 58 : "Auf das Streben nach in sich befriedigtem psychischen Leben [that is to say, pleasure] sind alle animalen Organismen angelegt." In his 'Grundzüge der Moral' (1883) and later works Dr Giżycki's principle and method are utilitarian. With the above may be compared Guyau, *Esquisse d'une morale sans obligation ni sanction* (1885), p. 15 : "L'action sort naturellement du fonctionnement de la vie, en grande partie inconscient ; elle entre aussitôt dans le domain de la conscience et de la jouissance, mais elle n'en vient pas. La tendance de l'être à persévérer dans l'être est le fond de tout désir sans constituer elle-même un désir déterminé." For a criticism of Guyau's method and results reference may be made to *Mind*, O.S., x. 276 ff.

to the hindrance of their efficiency.<sup>1</sup> The assumption in this argument, in addition to the constant postulate of natural selection, is simply that pleasure is a chief motive of action; the conclusion to which it leads is that there is a broad correspondence between life-preserving and pleasurable acts—that the preservation and development of life are pleasurable. It is necessary to examine with care the validity of this important argument with reference to the attacks that may be made on it from the pessimist point of view; and, if its doctrine of the correspondence of life and pleasure is not entirely erroneous, to enquire further whether this correspondence can be made to establish an end for conduct, in accordance with the theory of evolution, by measuring life in terms of pleasure.

3. Objec-  
tions to this  
argument:

What then is to be said of the supposed "conflict between Eudæmonism [Hedonism] and Evolutionism" which v. Hartmann<sup>2</sup> opposes to the optimist doctrine that evolution has tended to make life and pleasure coincide?

The problem of Pessimism resolves itself into two questions which admit of being kept distinct:

<sup>1</sup> Spencer, *Principles of Ethics*, i. 82 f.; *Principles of Psychology*, § 125, 3d ed., i. 280; Stephen, *Science of Ethics*, p. 83. The simplicity of this argument will be appreciated if we consider the difficulty Comte experienced in trying to reach a similar conclusion. See *Positive Philosophy*, Miss Martineau's translation, ii. 87 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Phänomenologie des sittlichen Bewusstseins*, pp. 701, 708.

(a) The first is, Does life on the whole give, or can it give, a balance of pleasure? This is the fundamental question of the value of life as put by those, whether optimists or pessimists, who assume that 'value' means 'pleasure-value.' If it be answered in the negative, the hedonistic ideal must be the reduction of the adverse balance to the zero-point of feeling striven after by Eastern ascetics, but, to all appearance, obtained only and most easily by death.

(b) The second question is, Does the evolution of life lead to an increase of pleasure and diminution of pain? This is the question brought into prominence in recent discussions, and of most importance for the present enquiry; and upon an affirmative answer to it Evolutionist Hedonism is plainly dependent. To both questions v. Hartmann gives an answer in the negative.

(a) If the pessimist view of life is correct Spencer held,<sup>1</sup> then "the ending of an undesirable existence being the thing to be wished, that which causes the ending of it must be applauded." And this is so far true, though not necessarily true in the way Spencer thought. For this undesirable existence cannot, perhaps, be brought to a final conclusion merely by ending the individual life: this might only leave room for other individuals to fill the vacant places. Annihilation (it may be said) is the end not directly for the individual, but for the

(a) that life cannot bring more pleasure than pain;

race. Not life itself, according to Schopenhauer, but the will to live is to be killed in the individual man. Even this code of morals, Hartmann thinks, is a remnant of the false, pre-evolutionist individualism, and would hinder the course of the universe, by leaving the game to be played out by the remaining individuals whose wills were not strong enough to curb or kill themselves. It is a mistake to think that the will to live which pulses through all existence can be annihilated by the phenomenal individual. The individual's duty is not to seek for himself the painlessness of annihilation or passionless Nirwâna, but to join in the ceaseless painful striving of nature, and, by contributing to the development of life, to hasten its arrival once more at the goal of unconsciousness. The self-destruction, not of the individual will, but of the cosmic or universal will, is the final end of action.

Apart from the metaphysical view of things with which this estimate of the value of life is connected, and which may be regarded perhaps as its consequent rather than its cause,<sup>1</sup> the pessimist doctrine has a double foundation, in psychology and in the facts of life.

(a) from the negative nature of pleasure,

Psychologically, it seems to be best supported by Schopenhauer's doctrine of will or desire as an incessant painful striving, pleasure being merely

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Vaibinger : Hartmann, Dühring und Lange (1876), p. 124.



the negative of this pain, and always coming short of its complete satisfaction. But this position involves a double error in psychological analysis, and is relinquished even by Hartmann, though he still regards pleasure as in all cases satisfaction of desire. The painful element in desire is itself merely a secondary or derived fact in human nature, consequent on the inhibition of conative energy. The pleasures we call passive are independent of desire; and those which attend upon activity, but are not themselves part of the end of action, are also enjoyed without being striven after in order to satisfy a want. Further, it is a mistake to look upon the pleasure of attainment as a mere negation of the pain of desire. The painful element of desire comes from the inhibition of the attempted realisation of an ideal object. In unsatisfied desires, it is true, the pain is in proportion to the strength of the restrained longing. But, if the inhibition is overcome, the pain is not measured by the strength of the desire, but rather by the amount of opposition that has to be conquered in satisfying it. Hence, not only are there other pleasures than those of satisfied desire, but even the pleasure got from such satisfaction may be something more than a mere recompense for the pain accompanying the desire.

The support got by pessimism from the facts of <sup>( $\beta$ )</sup> from the facts of human life is more difficult to estimate at its true man life ;

value. It is obvious that pleasure and pain are intermingled in almost every experience; and the proportion in which they are mixed varies greatly in different circumstances and according to the susceptibilities of different persons. If we ask a number of people whether life is on the whole pleasant to them, not only do we receive a variety of answers which it is hard to sum up and average, but the answers we get are apt to reflect the feeling of the moment rather than to represent an impartial estimate of the pleasure and pain of a lifetime. Thus experience seems unable to give us a trustworthy answer to the average pleasure-value of life; but, if its verdict is correct, that to some life is pleasant, though to many painful, this shows that a surplus of pain does not follow from the nature of life, and thus destroys the position of thoroughgoing pessimism, which looks upon this as the worst of all possible worlds.

(b) that the evolution of life does not tend to pleasure.

(b) It may still be maintained, however—and this is the position which chiefly concerns us here—that the course of evolution does not tend to increase the pleasure in life at the expense of the pain in it, and that, therefore, even although pleasure and evolution may both of them be possible ends of conduct, they are ends which point in different directions and lead to different courses of action.

It is necessary for the evolutionist who holds

that the development of life does not tend to increase pleasure, to meet argument already adduced<sup>1</sup> to show their correspondence. Nor does that argument seem to be altogether beyond criticism. To compare the progress shown in development with pleasure, we ought to know exactly what is meant by both terms. Yet it is impossible to have a clear notion of progress without an idea of the end to which it tends, and this has not yet been obtained. It is largely on account of the difficulty of obtaining such an idea that some evolutionists seem to have been driven to measure progress in terms of pleasure, just as, on the other hand, owing to the difficulty of estimating and summing up pleasures, some hedonists have been induced to measure them by the progress of evolution. What we have now to see is whether the correspondence assumed between progress and pleasure actually exists. And, to avoid the tautology of saying that progress is increase of life, we must judge of it simply by empirical observation of the nature of human activity and of the course of human affairs.

(a) Incompleteness of the evolutionist argument.

Now the attempted identification of pleasurable and life-promoting activities rests on an incomplete account of the motives and results of action. For, in the first place, even if we were to admit that pleasure and avoidance of pain are the only motives

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 211 f.

to action, it is clear that the influence of natural selection has not prevented actions hurtful to life from being sometimes accompanied by pleasant sensations. Two causes may be suggested for this result. In the first place, there are different kinds of competition in nature. The struggle which determines the onward movement of development is not simply the conflict of individuals to maintain themselves: that alone might have been expected to lead to a greater measure of harmony between individual pleasure and individual survival than is actually found. It is also a conflict between groups: and this conflict favours modes of action which are disconnected with individual pleasure, and leads also to the individual being protected by the group from some of the consequences of his own desires. Again, in the second place, man possesses the power of representing ideal states in the imagination, and is thus able to avoid actions hurtful to life, although these actions are pleasant at the time. For the hurtful consequences of the action may be so vividly represented in idea as to outweigh the influence of the present pleasure which could be got from its enjoyment.<sup>1</sup>

Further, the analysis of volition involved in the argument seems to be insufficient. For there are other springs of action to be taken account of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fiske, *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* (1874), ii. 332 f.

than pleasure and its opposite. Habit, imitation, and interests of a more comprehensive kind than desire of pleasant feeling, are all motives to action. It is true that pleasure is always felt in the successful performance of an action, and it is also true that the inhibition of will is always painful; but it is none the less incorrect to look either upon the pleasure that follows from the action, or the pain that would be the result of its inhibition as, in ordinary cases, the motive. It is motives of a different kind than pleasure, such as imitation<sup>1</sup> and the influence of ideal ends, which most often lead to progress. And the progress that is due to such motives cannot be measured by its effects in increasing pleasure, nor assumed to make pleasure and life correspond. At the best, therefore, the above argument only proves a general tendency towards the coincidence of pleasurable actions with actions which promote life; it does not show that the increase of life can be accurately measured by pleasure. The process of natural selection might kill off all organisms whose desires led them normally to action hurtful to life. But sufficient evi-

<sup>1</sup> "Imitation," according to Kant (*Grundlegung zur Met. d. Sitten*, Werke, iv. 257), "has no place at all for morals"; and this is true if the naked law of duty—or respect for it—is the sole ethical motive. But if morality consists in the attainment of an ideal which is being gradually realised in man, moral value will not be denied to the motive which leads the individual to fashion his own nature after that in which morality has attained more complete realisation.

dence has not been brought forward to show that it is fitted to produce an exact proportion between progress and pleasure.

(β) The pessimist doctrine that life tends to misery :

(γ) the hypothesis of the unconscious ;

Hartmann, however, attempts to strike a more fatal blow than this at the presupposition involved in the argument for evolutionist hedonism. For he contends that, throughout all life, the great pulse of progress is neither, on the one hand, desire for pleasure, nor, on the other, the more complex and varied motives just referred to, but that it is the incessant striving towards fulness of life of an universal unconscious will, which is manifested in all things, and which is for ever pressing onwards towards conscious realisation, regardless of the increase of pain which the course of evolution involves. But this hypothesis of unconscious will is not a justifiable metaphysical principle got at by the analysis of experience, and necessary for its explanation, though lying beyond it. It is a 'metempirical,' or rather mythical, cause interpolated into the processes of experience. Hence the antagonism in which it stands to psychological fact: its disregard of the effect of pleasure as a powerful motive in volition ; and its neglect of the obvious truth that function so reacts upon organ that all actions have, by repetition merely, a tendency to be performed with greater ease, and, therefore, to yield in their performance increase of pleasure. The smoothness and precision with

which it works may, indeed, lead to a function being performed unconsciously, and thus without either pain or pleasure. But the normal exercise of conscious activity is uniformly pleasurable.<sup>1</sup>

While giving up Schopenhauer's doctrine of the merely negative character of pleasure, Hartmann yet contends that "eternal limits" are set by the very nature of volition which make it impossible to have a world with more pleasure in it than pain. But his arguments<sup>2</sup> come very far short of proving his case. For, in the first place, to say that the stimulation and wearying of the nerves imply the necessity of a cessation of pleasure as well as of pain, is to confuse complete states of consciousness with the subjective feeling which accompanies each state. It is not true that one ever becomes weary of pleasure. But any mental state, however pleasurable to start with, tends to become monotonous, wearisome, or painful. Pleasure thus requires a change from one mental state to another: to say that it requires a change from pleasure to something else is a contradiction in terms. It is the objects or activity that require to be varied, not the feeling of pleasure. Again, in the second place, it is true that pleasure is to be regarded as indirect *in so far as* it is entirely due to the cessation of a pain, and not to instantaneous

(bb) the nature of volition;

<sup>1</sup> See the concluding pages of this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Philosophie des Unbewussten, 6th ed., p. 660 ff.

satisfaction of will. But it does not do to regard the pleasure as altogether indirect when, although the cessation of a pain is necessary for its production, it is itself something more than this cessation. The inhibition of will often prevents the realisation of an object which is very much more than a recompense in pleasurable quality for the pain of the restraint; and, although the pleasure only arises when this painful state of inhibition is removed, it brings a direct and positive gain over and above the gratification of the cessation of the pain. In the third place, Hartmann argues that the satisfaction of will is often unconscious, whereas pain is *eo ipso* conscious. But, even admitting the reality of unconscious will or desire, which this argument involves, it does not follow that pleasure and pain are differently affected in regard to it. If pain is *eo ipso* conscious, so also is pleasure; if the satisfaction of unconscious desire gives no pleasure, neither does the absence of such satisfaction give pain.<sup>1</sup> It is true, as Hartmann adds in the fourth place, that desire is often long and the joy of satisfaction fleeting; but this holds not so much of mental pleasures as of those connected with physical appetite. Of them it is true that

"These violent delights have violent ends,  
And in their triumph die."

But in the higher pleasures with more permanent

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Sully, *Pessimism*, p. 226 n.



objects of pursuit, although the desire may be long-continued, the pleasure does not disappear in the moment of gratification.

It would seem, therefore, that the pessimist psychology, in treating pleasure in a different way from pain, mistakes the true nature of both, and prevents the argument from being faced which has been brought forward to show the increasing correspondence of pleasure and life.

The failure of the psychological argument makes the whole burden of the proof of pessimism rest upon the argument from historical facts. And the attempt has been definitely made to show, from observation of the course of human affairs, that the progress of the world tends to misery. It is necessary, therefore, to ask whether it can be established that the facts included under the vague term 'human progress' have a normal tendency either to increase pleasure or to act in the opposite way. Now progress is a characteristic both of the individual and of society; but pleasure only belongs to the former, so that an answer to the question whether individual progress tends to increase the surplus of pleasure over pain, still leaves unsettled the question as to the effect of social progress.

It seems evident that both the physical and mental development of the individual imply greater

( $\infty$ ) the facts  
of human  
progress :

individual  
progress ;

adaptability to and correspondence with, the external world, and that, on account of this development, there is less unpleasant friction between outer and inner relations, and means are at hand for obtaining objects of desire with less exertion than formerly. But, at the same time, the increase of knowledge and of skill always implies not merely the means of satisfying old wants, but the creation of new ones: we see more of the evil in the world than our forefathers did, and there are more avenues by which it can approach us, if we have also more effective means for avoiding what we dislike. Further, the widening of the sympathetic feelings and their consequent activities, and the refinement of the whole sensitive nature by which it responds more quickly and accurately to emotional stimuli, have made the present generation more susceptible to both pain and pleasure than its predecessors. But Hartmann's argument that the duller nervous system of the savage races (*Naturvölker*) makes them happier than the civilised (*Culturvölker*),<sup>1</sup> leaves out of sight the new sources of pleasure as well as pain that are opened up to a refined sensibility. According to Hartmann, the æsthetic sensibilities may be a source of painless pleasure: yet even their cultivation cannot be said to be matter of pure gain to their possessors; for the pain of discord is to be set against—in his opinion, it out-

<sup>1</sup> Phil. d. Unbewussten, p. 747.

weighs—the pleasure of harmony. On the whole, then, it would appear that the evolution of the individual leads to greater possibilities both of pleasure and of pain. The refinement of the intellectual and the emotional nature opens up wider ranges of both kinds of feeling; but it seems impossible to arrive at a quite confident and objective judgment as to its tendency; and we are driven to look mainly to the improvement of the social environment for the means of increasing pleasure and diminishing pain.

But to estimate the hedonistic value of social progress is a still more difficult task than the preceding. For the march of affairs often appears to have little regard to its effect on the happiness of the greater number of people concerned. Industrially, it may be thought that the increase in the amount of wealth produced affords a vastly greater means of comfort and luxury. Yet, it is doubtful whether this increase has always been sufficient to keep pace with the growth of population; and it is certain that every society whose territory is limited, must, when its numbers have increased beyond a certain point, begin to experience the diminishing returns which nature yields for the labour expended upon it. And, even although the average quantity of wealth be greater now than it has been, it must be remembered that wealth is measured by its amount, whereas happiness depends on the equality

social progress :

industrial,

with which that amount is distributed.<sup>1</sup> Yet the present industrial *régime* tends to the accumulation of immense wealth in a few hands, rather than to its proportionate increase throughout the community. The industrial progress which increases the wealth of the rich, has little to recommend it if it leaves the 'labouring poor' at a starvation-wage.

“And what if Trade sow cities  
Like shells along the shore,  
And thatch with towns the prairie broad  
With railways ironed o'er?”—

if the population can be divided into plutocrats and proletariat. Moreover, the very nature of economic production may seem to imply an opposition between social progress and individual well-being. For the former, in demanding the greatest possible amount of produce, requires an excessive and increasing specialisation of labour. Each worker

<sup>1</sup> Bentham, *Theory of Legislation* (by Dumont, 1876), p. 103 ff. Wundt, *Physiologische Psychologie*, 5th ed., ii. 317, finds in this an instance of Weber's law. Thus, the man with £100 receives the same pleasure on receipt of £1, as the possessor of £1000 does on receiving £10. As Wundt remarks, however, this is only true within certain limits. Sixpence may give more pleasure to a beggar who is never far from the starvation-point, than the clearing of a million to Baron Rothschild. Further than this, the law only states an 'abstract' truth. For the susceptibility to pleasure is not only very different in different individuals, but this difference depends on many other circumstances than the amount of wealth already in possession,—such as original emotional susceptibility, &c.

must perform that operation only to which he has been specially trained, or which he can do best. And in this way industrialism has a tendency to occupy the greater part of the waking hours of an increasing proportion of human lives in the repetition of a short series of mechanical movements which call out a bare minimum of the faculties of the worker, dwarf his nature, and reduce his life to a mere succession of the same monotonous sensation.<sup>1</sup> In spite, therefore, of immense improvements in the general conditions of wellbeing, it is still difficult to say that the happiness of the average human life has been much increased by the march of industrial progress.

A more hopeful view may, perhaps, be taken of the effect of political progress. The increase of popular government gratifies the desire for power, and, in some cases, even tends to a more efficient management of affairs. Still more important in its effect on happiness is the greater security for life and property which the gradual consolidation of political control has brought about. It would seem, too, that the harsher features of the struggle by which this advance takes place have been modified; and that the war of politics has abated in fury more than the war of trade. On the whole, therefore, the tendency of modern political rule appears to be towards an almost unmixed gain in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Comte, *Positive Philosophy*, ii. 144.

respect of happiness,—by the security it affords for life and property, by its wide distribution of political power, and by the room it gives for individual freedom. Yet the last of these results—in the *laissez-faire* system of industrialism to which it has led, and which, in spite of many modifications, is still in the ascendant—has effects of a more doubtful character.

This mere reference to one or two of the leading features of progress would not be sufficient to support a thesis either as to its beneficial or baneful tendency. But evidence enough has been led to show that the effects on pleasure of individual and social development are of a mixed kind,—that culture and civilisation have neither the tendency to misery which Hartmann follows Rousseau in attributing to them,<sup>1</sup> nor, on the other hand, that steady correspondence with increasing pleasure which would be required to establish the position of evolutionist hedonism.

Necessity of  
choosing  
between  
evolution-  
ism and  
hedonism.

It follows, therefore, that, without adopting a pessimist view, we must still make our choice between evolutionism and hedonism. The course of evolution—so far as experience helps us to understand it—cannot be measured by increase of pleasure. Nothing is said here to show that it is not perfectly consistent to hold that the moral feelings and ideas, the customs to which they have

<sup>1</sup> Phän. d. s. B., p. 640.

given rise, and the institutions in which they are embodied, have been produced by the ordinary laws of evolution, and yet to maintain that the moral end for reflective beings is the hedonistic or utilitarian end. It may be possible, that is to say, to be an evolutionist in psychology and sociology at the same time that one is a hedonist in ethics. But it is not allowable to adopt pleasure as the end, and yet speak of it as determined by evolution. Evolution can determine no such end until it be shown that the progress it connotes implies a proportionate increase of pleasure.

The same conclusion may be supported by an enquiry into the nature of pleasure and pain as modes of mental experience. For this will bring out both the subjective nature of pleasure and its dependence upon conditions which cannot be identified with that increase of life to which evolution is said to tend.

(4) Pleasure and pain as modes of mental experience :

In the first place, pleasure and pain are subjective. In action the subject seeks an end distinct from his present state of consciousness, and recognised as such; in knowledge—in sensation even—he is aware of something which he does not identify with himself; but it is different with pleasure and pain. The feeling is all his own: it is nothing outside his conscious state at the time; properly speaking, it does not refer to anything else,

(e) their subjectivity,

although there are always, at the same time, per-  
ceptual or ideal elements present which have an  
objective reference. Like sensations, pleasure and  
pain are elementary facts of mind; but they are  
elementary facts of a different order. The difficulty  
of defining pleasure or pain is not the same kind  
of difficulty as that which meets us if we attempt  
to define some elementary sensation. The latter  
is connected in definite ways with other similar  
sensations, can be compared and associated with  
them, and combine with them into an object of  
perception. Pleasures do not acquire this objective  
character. Even to distinguish qualities amongst  
them we must refer to the sensations or ideas  
which they accompany. They seem to have no  
distinguishable existence of their own, as sensa-  
tions and concepts and actions have. They can be  
spoken of only as affections of the percipient and  
active subject, different in kind both from the  
objects it knows and from the actions it performs.  
As Hamilton has put it, pleasure and pain are  
“subjectively subjective”:<sup>1</sup> they are affections of  
the subject, not modes of the object-world.  
“Pleasure is not a fact, nor is pain a fact, but  
one fact is pleasant, another painful.”<sup>2</sup> Pleasure,

<sup>1</sup> Lectures on Metaphysics, ii. 432.

<sup>2</sup> L. Dumont, *Théorie scientifique de la sensibilité*, 2nd ed., p. 83;  
cf. F. Bouillier, *Du plaisir et de la douleur*, 2nd ed., p. 29 ff.  
The same view is held by Volkmann, *Lehrbuch der Psychologie*,  
§ 127, 3rd ed., ii. 300: “Das Gefühl ist nämlich keine eigene



therefore, is a mere feeling of the subject which accompanies its relation to the object-world, without being itself a part of the object-world. It is not something by itself which we can choose rather than something else, as we may select a peach instead of an apple. but connexion with objects,

The relative and transient nature of pleasure has been urged as an objection against any form of hedonism by many philosophers since the time of Plato. In our own day the arguments both of T. H. Green and of Sidgwick have shown that the calculus of pleasures and pains which Bentham's ethics requires is much less certain and easy than its author supposed. It is true that Green sometimes overstated his case. The nature of pleasure does not prove hedonism to be an impossible end for conduct. making hedonism possible. Although we cannot aim at pleasure *per se*, we can aim at objects which we have reason to believe will be accompanied by pleasant feeling. And, although pleasure and pain are not quantities that can be added and subtracted,<sup>1</sup> we may foresee that one

Vorstellung neben den anderen (es gibt keine eigenen Gefühlsvorstellungen), ja überhaupt gar keine Vorstellung." See also J. Ward, article "Psychology" in *Ency. Brit.*, xx. 401. Bain's view is different; but it does not altogether prevent him from recognising the subjectivity of feeling: "Without intellectual images clearly recollected we do not remember feelings; the reproduction of feeling is an intellectual fact, and the groundwork is intellectual imagery."—*Emotions*, p. 63, 4th ed.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Green, *Introduction to Hume's Treatise*, ii. § 7.

course of conduct will be accompanied by pleasant feeling, another by painful feeling, and, on that account, we may choose the former. In many cases we can even make a quantitative estimate, and say that the pleasant feeling accompanying one course of action is more intense than that accompanying another. And we choose one object rather than another, not merely because one is pleasant and the other painful, but (in case both are pleasant) because we expect more intense or more prolonged pleasure from one than from the other. How inexact and tentative are these estimates of pleasure has been abundantly shown by Sidgwick.<sup>1</sup> As the guide of action they are weak and faltering. But yet there is nothing in the subjective nature of pleasure which makes it impossible for us to take it as our practical end in conduct.

Difficulty  
for hedon-  
ism arising  
from the  
facts of  
evolution.

The difficulty arises when we connect hedonism with the theory of evolution: when we use the conception of pleasure for the purpose of giving a precise meaning to that increase and development of life to which the course of evolution is said to tend, and which is sometimes put forward as the end which the evolution-theory prescribes for conduct; or when, conversely, having adopted the maximum of pleasures as our end, we seek to explain that conception by means of the con-

<sup>1</sup> *Methods of Ethics*, Book ii. chaps. ii.-iii.

ception of evolution. As long as we are content to look upon human nature as consisting of unchanging modes of activity, and as having constant susceptibilities for pleasure and pain, we may adopt the increase of pleasure and diminution of pain as our aim even in conduct which has a distant end in view. But the case is altered when we take account of the fact that man's actions and sensibilities are subject to indefinite modification. Pleasure, as we have seen, is dependent upon the state of conscious apprehension and activity at any moment. By itself it is not a possible object of pursuit. We always aim at some end which can be expressed in objective terms: although we may aim at certain objects rather than others simply on account of their pleasurable accompaniment. It may happen, however, that a kind of object or action which is pleasurable at one time may become painful at another time, and that what is now painful may cease to be so and may become pleasant. In this case our action, if it aims at pleasure, would have to be entirely changed, our practical ethics would need to be revised and reversed. And, although no sudden alteration of this kind ever takes place, the theory of evolution shows that a gradual modification of the sort does go on.

The question concerning the conditions which determine the presence of pleasure and pain is

(b) The conditions of pleasure and pain.

too intricate and too unsettled, on the physiological side as well as on the psychological, to admit of discussion in this place. Yet it may be possible, while avoiding unnecessary controversy, to bring out certain results which bear upon the problem before us.

(a) Pleasure  
not defin-  
able as the  
sense of in-  
creased  
vitality.

There is one theory which might be regarded as settling the question out of hand, were it only able to establish its own agreement with the facts; and that is the famous doctrine that pleasure follows, or is the sense of, increased life—pain, on the other hand, being the sense of diminished vitality.<sup>1</sup> But it has been already shown that neither the actual facts of life, nor the tendencies to action, can be so interpreted as to make their nature and development correspond, with any degree of exactness, with pleasure and its increase.<sup>2</sup> Nor is it possible to make out that every pain corresponds to a loss of vitality, while every pleasure heightens it. To assert that pleasure-giving actions and life-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Spinoza, *Ethica*, iii. 11, schol.; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, i. 6, p. 25; Bain, *The Senses and the Intellect*, 4th ed., p. 303. Bain's statement is carefully guarded: "A very considerable number of the facts may be brought under the following principle—namely, that states of pleasure are connected with an increase, and states of pain with an abatement, of some, or all, of the vital functions."

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 217 ff.; and cf. Spencer, *Psychology*, § 126, i. 284: "In the case of mankind, then, there has arisen, and must long continue, a deep and involved derangement of the natural connections between pleasure and beneficial actions, and between pains and detrimental actions."

preserving actions coincide is simply to neglect inconvenient facts. Pleasure is, no doubt, a usual accompaniment of the normal processes of life; and pain reaches its climax in death. But, within the range of experience, there are whole classes of facts which the generalisation cannot cover. Painful experiences are not always destructive of vitality, nor are all pleasant experiences beneficial. As Bain, who always keeps the facts in view, admits with regard to the feeling-tone of sensation, "we cannot contend that the degree of augmented vital energy corresponds with the degree of the pleasure."<sup>1</sup> The same discrepancy may be traced in more complex experiences. The effort after a fuller life, whether physical or mental, even when its ultimate success is not doubtful, may bring more pain than pleasure; while the life which never strains its powers towards the limits of endurance, may find almost uninterrupted pleasure: but such pleasure is the sure herald of the process of degeneration.

Pleasure does not always show that the vitality of the organism as a whole, nor even that the vital power of some one of its functions, is on the increase. But it is not dissociated from the activity of the subject. Conscious activity which attains its end is pleasant; thwarted or unsuccessful activ-

(β) Pleasure dependent on unhindered and successful functioning.

<sup>1</sup> The Senses and the Intellect, p. 306. The Law of Conservation is incomplete, Bain holds, and must be supplemented by the Law of Stimulation (p. 315).

ity is painful. With differences of detail, this view is adopted by many psychologists as the most adequate account of the conditions which determine the appearance of pleasant and painful feelings. It is expressed in Hamilton's view of pleasure as the reflex of unimpeded functioning,<sup>1</sup> and in Spencer's doctrine that pleasure is the concomitant of medium activities.<sup>2</sup> It is more precisely formulated in Professor Ward's suggestion "that there is pleasure in proportion as a maximum of attention is effectively exercised, and pain in proportion as such effective attention is frustrated by distractions, shocks, or incomplete and faulty adaptations, or fails of exercise, owing to the narrowness of the field of consciousness and the slowness and smallness of its changes."<sup>3</sup> Professor Stout's view is similar: "The antithesis between pleasure and pain is coincident with the antithesis between free and impeded progress towards an end. Unimpeded progress is pleasant

<sup>1</sup> Hamilton, Lectures, ii. 440: "Pleasure is the reflex of the spontaneous and unimpeded exertion of a power of whose energies we are conscious. Pain, a reflex of the overstrained or repressed exertion of such a power." Cf. Aristotle, *Eth. N.*, vii. 12, p. 1153 a 14, x. 4, p. 1174 b 20.

<sup>2</sup> Spencer, *Psychology*, § 123, i. 277: "Generally speaking, then, pleasures are the concomitants of medium activities, where the activities are of kinds liable to be in excess or in defect; and where they are of kinds not liable to be excessive, pleasure increases as the activity increases, except where the activity is either constant or involuntary."

<sup>3</sup> Art. "Psychology," *Ency. Brit.*, xx. 71.

in proportion to the intensity and complexity of mental excitement. An activity which is thwarted or retarded either by the presence of positive obstruction, or by the absence of co-operative conditions, or in any other conceivable way, is painful in proportion to its intensity and complexity, and to the degree of hindrance."<sup>1</sup>

It is not necessary to discuss this theory in detail. It has its own difficulties to meet, especially in connexion with the pleasures and pains of the senses. But the most obvious objection to it—that it leaves the so-called ‘passive pleasures’ unexplained—is without weight as long as it cannot be shown that mental life is ever purely passive, and without even the subjective reaction involved in the direction of attention to an object. For our present purposes it is sufficient to take account of the relations in which pleasure stands to conduct; and, in this connexion, it is clear that facile and successful activities are pleasant, and that an action is painful in so far as it is thwarted or ineffective.

If, then, pleasure is the result of effective functioning, its conditions must be modified along with any change in the modes of activity which can be carried on without serious opposition and to a successful issue. In the same way, could it be held that pleasure follows increase of vital energy, it

Change of  
feeling with  
modifica-  
tion of func-  
tion.

<sup>1</sup> Analytic Psychology, ii. 270.

would be subject to modification along with the modification of the conditions under which life may be preserved and developed. Now it is matter of fact that the kinds of activity in which one takes pleasure, or which give one pain, undergo constant, though gradual, modification. A state of mind may be at first pleasurable, but, if it be long-continued, the pleasure will yield to an unpleasant feeling of monotony. A similar change may take place in a painful state of mind, its continuance does not prolong the same intensity of painful consciousness, but the sensibility becomes dulled and the pain diminishes, or factors in the mental state are so modified as to alter the feeling-tone. The transition is most striking in the case of motor activities. In learning to walk, or to ride, or to play any instrument, the first experiences are of painful effort. Gradually, however, the required co-ordinations of movement are found to entail less and less pain, until the feeling passes over into its opposite, and we have a pleasurable sense of successful effort and well-adapted functioning. And, just as pain may give way to pleasure, so pleasure too may subside: the action may become automatic, and so pass out of consciousness altogether, unless it be so long continued as to produce fatigue, that is, pain. Habit, which intensifies perceptions, weakens pleasure and pain.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dumont, *Théorie scientifique*, p. 78.



From the preceding discussion two things may be inferred. In the first place, pleasure and pain are connected with the activities of the subject: hindrances and defeat are felt as painful; pleasure results from overcoming obstacles, and from success in attaining an end; and the pleasure increases with the intensity of the activity. In the second place, the sources of pleasure and pain are modified with the modification of these conditions: we learn to solve difficulties, to accustom ourselves to new circumstances, to guide to a successful issue events with which we were formerly unable to cope; in these and many other ways, pleasure comes to be experienced in modes of activity which were at one time painful, and crowns the effort towards a fuller and higher life. Results.

What the doctrine of evolution adds to this is its proof of the indefinite modifiability of human function. "It is an essential principle of life," Spencer wrote,<sup>1</sup> before he had arrived at his general theory of evolution, "that a faculty to which circumstances do not allow full exercise diminishes; and that a faculty on which circumstances make excessive demands increases"; and to this we must now add, "that, supposing it consistent with maintenance of life, there is no kind of activity which will not become a source of pleasure if continued; and that therefore pleasure will eventually accompany every (c) Application of the theory of evolution:

<sup>1</sup> Social Statics, p. 79.

mode of action demanded by social conditions.”<sup>1</sup> It is, he held, a “biological truth,” that “everywhere faculties adjust themselves to the conditions of existence in such wise that the activities those conditions require become pleasurable.”<sup>2</sup> The vast periods of time over which evolution stretches are scarcely needed to show how pleasure may be made to follow from almost any course of action consistent with the continuance of life. The change of habits which often takes place in the history of a nation, and even in the life of an individual, makes this sufficiently obvious. And, if we still think of making attainment of pleasure the end of conduct, the doctrine of evolution must give us pause.

any conduct  
consistent  
with condi-  
tions of life  
may come to  
be pleasur-  
able;

It has been already argued that, given certain sources of, and susceptibilities for, pleasure, the course of evolution has not been such as to produce an exact coincidence between them and the actions which further life. But it would seem that, given habits of acting which are consistent with the conditions of life, and which are systematically carried out, these will not fail to grow pleasant as the organism becomes adapted to them. At the best, it is difficult enough to say, even for the individual, whether one imagined object or course of action will exceed another in pleasurable feeling or not. But, when we remember that function and feeling may be modified indefinitely, it is impossible

<sup>1</sup> Principles of Ethics, i. 186.

<sup>2</sup> Mind, O.S., vi. 85.

to say what course of conduct will produce the greatest amount of pleasure for the race. Taking in all its effects, we can hardly say that one way of seeking pleasure is better—that is, will bring more pleasure—than another. So profound are the modifications which evolution produces, that it seems impossible to guide the active tendencies of mankind towards the goal of greatest pleasure, unless, perhaps, by the quite general statement that the greatest pleasure will be got from the greatest amount of successful activity.

If, then, we have been seeking to define the evolutionist end by interpreting it in terms of pleasure, it appears that we have only succeeded in making the round of a circle: pleasure as the end is seen to be only definable as life or activity, although it was adopted as the end in order that by its help we might discover what life or activity meant as the end for conduct. We may, perhaps, still be able to hold to a form of hedonism, if we turn our attention from the race to a small portion of present mankind. In spite of the modifiability of function and its attendant feeling, we may still be able to say that such and such a course of action is likely to bring most pleasure to the individual. But we cannot extend such a means of interpreting the ethics of evolution to the race, where the possibility of modification is indefinitely great, and the pain incurred in initiating a change counts for little in comparison with its

maximum  
pleasure not  
definable  
unless in  
terms of  
life.

subsequent results. If we continue to look from the evolutionist point of view, the question, What conduct will on the whole bring most pleasure? only leads us back to the question, What conduct will most promote life? And it was to give meaning to this conception 'promotion of life' that it was interpreted in terms of greatest pleasure. The evolution-theory of ethics is thus seen to oscillate between the theory which looks upon the *summum bonum* as pleasure, and the theory which finds it in activity. But it contains elements which make it impossible for it to adhere to the former alternative. The comprehensiveness of its view of life makes it unable to adopt pleasure as the end, since pleasure changes with every modification of function. And it has now to be seen whether the empirical method of interpretation to which it adheres will allow of its notion of life or activity affording a satisfactory end for conduct, or any standard of moral worth.

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE ETHICS OF EVOLUTION.

IN showing the important bearing which evolution has on the causes of pleasure, the argument of the preceding chapter has also made clear that the ends of evolutionism and of hedonism cannot be made to explain one another. The theory which starts with a maximum of pleasure as the ultimate end, but points to the course of evolution as showing how that end is to be realised, is confronted by the fact that the development of life does not always tend to increased pleasure, and that the laws of its development cannot therefore be safely adopted as maxims for the attainment of pleasure. The same objection may be taken to the method of interpreting the evolutionist standard by means of the pleasurable results of conduct. The two do not correspond with that exactness which would admit of one doing duty for the other as a practical guide. And a further difficulty has been shown to stand

Want of harmony between evolutionism and hedonism.

in the way of this method. For, on coming to analyse pleasure, we find that it may, by habituation, arise from any—or almost any—course of conduct which is consistent with the conditions of existence. The evolutionist, therefore, can have no surer idea of greatest pleasure—even although this may not be a very sure one—than that it will follow in the train of the greatest or most varied activity which harmonises with the laws of life.

Necessity of investigating independent contribution of evolution to ethics.

We must therefore forsake the method of eclecticism, and enquire whether the theory of evolution can make any independent contribution towards determining either an ideal for conduct or a standard for distinguishing between right and wrong. We are frequently told that it prescribes as the end ‘preservation,’ or ‘development,’ or ‘the health of the society.’ But to obtain a clear meaning for such notions, we must see what definite content the theory of evolution can give them,—without considering, at present, the grounds for transforming them into ethical precepts.<sup>1</sup> Now, it may be thought—and the suggestion deserves careful examination—that we may find in the characteristics of evolution itself<sup>2</sup> an indication of the end which

<sup>1</sup> Cf. below, pp. 282, 320 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Taking evolution in its widest sense, since the theory of evolution does not “imply some intrinsic proclivity in every species towards a higher form.”—Spencer, *First Principles*, App. p. 574 ; *Principles of Sociology*, i. 106.

organisms produced by and subject to evolution are naturally fitted to attain. These characteristics must therefore be passed under review, that their ethical bearings may be seen.

1. The first condition of development, and even of life, is correspondence between an organism and its environment. The waste implied in the processes which constitute the life of an organised body has to be supplied by nutriment got from surrounding objects. It requires food, air, light, and heat in due proportions in order that its various organs may do their work. When these circumstances change, either it adapts itself to the new conditions or death ensues. Thus "we find that every animal is limited to a certain range of climate; every plant to certain zones of latitude and elevation,"<sup>1</sup>—though nothing differs more among different species than the extent of an organism's adaptability to varying conditions. A definite organism and a medium suitable to it are called by Comte the two "fundamental correlative conditions of life"; according to Spencer they constitute life. "Conformity" is absolutely necessary between "the vital functions of any organism and the conditions in which it is placed." In this conformity there are varying degrees, and "the completeness of the life will be proportionate to the completeness

1. Adaptation to environment: necessary for life;

<sup>1</sup> Spencer, *Principles of Biology*, i. 73.

of the correspondence.”<sup>1</sup> Even when life is not altogether extinguished, it is impeded by imperfect adaptation. Where external circumstances make the attainment of nourishment difficult and precarious, life is shortened in extent, and, within its limits, more occupied with simply maintaining its necessary functions—less full, varied, and active. The same holds good whether the external circumstances are natural or social,—applies equally to those whose energies are exhausted in the production of a bare livelihood from a niggard soil and unpropitious climate, and to those who, under changed conditions, feel the hardship of adapting themselves to a new social medium.

spoken of as  
the ethical  
end ;

Shall we say, then, that the end of human conduct is adaptation to environment? This seems to be the position taken up by some evolutionists. In the language of von Baer,<sup>2</sup> “the end of ends is always that the organic body be adapted to the conditions of the earth, its elements and means of nutriment”; and Spencer has said “that all evil results from the non-adaptation of constitution to condition.”<sup>3</sup> The hedonism which Spencer definitely accepted as his ethical principle prevented him, indeed, from fully adopting the theory of human action which von Baer seemed to put forward as the result of the doctrine of evolution.

<sup>1</sup> Spencer, *Principles of Biology*, i. 82.

<sup>2</sup> Reden (1876), ii. 332.

<sup>3</sup> *Social Statics* (1850), p. 77.



Yet complete adaptation of constitution to condition is held by him to be characteristic of that perfect form of life to which evolution tends, and the laws of which are to be our guides in our present imperfect social condition. In working out his theory of ethics, he described acts as "good or bad according as they are well or ill adjusted to ends," identifying the good with "the conduct furthering self-preservation," and the bad with "the conduct tending to self-destruction."<sup>1</sup> The notion of self-preservation thus introduced is naturally suggested as the end subserved by the activity of an organism being adjusted to surrounding conditions. Self-preservation, therefore, rather than adaptation to environment, will be regarded as the end, with which adaptation will be connected as the essential means. defines the notion of self-preservation.

This notion of self-preservation has played a remarkable part in ethical and psychological discussion since the time of the Stoics. It withdraws attention from the relative and transient feeling of pleasure to the permanence of the living being. Thus, with the Stoics, the notion of self-preservation was accompanied by an ethics hostile to indulgence in pleasure; while, on the other hand, by Spinoza and by Hobbes, pleasure was held to be as the natural consequence of self-preserving acts—the former defining it as a transition from less to

<sup>1</sup> Principles of Ethics, i. 25.

greater perfection, the latter as the sense of what helps the vital functions. The theory of evolution has, of course, not only its distinctive contribution to make to the doctrine of the connexion between self-preservation and pleasure—a subject already referred to,—but may also show how an increasing harmony has been produced between acts which tend to self-preservation and those which tend to social preservation. With Spencer these two points are united. His doctrine that the “conduct which furthers race-maintenance evolves hand-in-hand with the conduct which furthers self-maintenance”<sup>1</sup> is preliminary to the establishment of the proposition that the highest life is one in which egoistic and altruistic acts harmonise with one another and with external conditions: “the life called moral is one in which this moving equilibrium reaches completeness or approaches most nearly to completeness.”<sup>2</sup>

Self-preser-  
vation and  
social-pre-  
servation.

As has been already pointed out,<sup>3</sup> it is not the case, in the present state of human life, that egoistic and altruistic tendencies, even when properly understood, always lead to the same course of conduct; so that the theory of evolution does not do away with the necessity for a ‘compromise’ between them. But, even had the theory of evolution overcome the opposition between the individual

<sup>1</sup> *Principles of Ethics*, i. 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> See above, chap. vii. pp. 180 ff.

and social standpoints, much would still remain to be done in order to establish a moral standard or determine the ethical end. It seems better, therefore, to pass over at present the conflict of competing interests. According to Pascal, "the entire succession of men, the whole course of ages, is to be regarded as one man always living and always learning." And this is a suggestion which the theory of evolution only states more definitely, though it cannot completely vindicate it. On this supposition, self-preservation *is* social-preservation, and the possibly divergent interests of the individual and the whole are left out of account. The end for the race, then, according to the theory most explicitly stated by von Baer, is a state of 'moving equilibrium'; and to this state of affairs we are at least, Spencer held, indubitably tending. In the final stage of human development, man will be perfectly adapted to the conditions of his environment, so that, to each change without, there will be an answering organic change. The ideal which seems to be held up to us is that of a time in which there will be no more irksome friction in the machinery of life, and circumstances will never be unpropitious because the organism will never be wanting in correspondence with them.

If this adaptation be adopted as the practical end for conduct under present conditions, and not merely as describing a far-off ideal to which we

(11) As the  
end for  
present  
conduct :  
opposed to  
progress ;

are supposed to be tending, man may continue to manifest a law of progress, but its initiation will be from external conditions. If 'adaptation to environment' is consistently made the end, activity will have to be restricted to suiting one's powers to an external order of nature, and desire will have to be curbed when it does not bring the means of satisfaction along with it. 'Bene latere' will again be an equivalent for 'bene vivere,' and happiness will have to be sought in withdrawal from the distractions of active life, and in the restriction of desire. It is strange to see the theory which is supposed to be based upon and to account for progress, returning in this way to an ideal similar to that in which the post-Aristotelian schools took refuge amid the decline of political and intellectual life in Greece. The end which Stoic and Epicurean alike sought in complete emancipation from the conditions of the external world,<sup>1</sup> is now, in more scientific phrase, made to consist in complete harmony with these conditions. But, in their practical results, the two theories would seem scarcely to differ. It is not astonishing, therefore, if this gospel of renunciation finds little favour among practical men in our day. It is seen that, if a man has not wants, he will make no efforts, and that, if he make no efforts, his condition can never be bettered. Thus social reformers have often found

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Zeller, *Phil. d. Griechen*, 3d ed., III. i. 454, 470.

that the classes they have tried to elevate did not feel the evil of their lot as their benefactors saw it, and they have had to create the consciousness of wants before attempting to satisfy them.<sup>1</sup> And the practical tendency finds its counterpart in speculative opinion, so that, whereas Epicurus placed happiness in freedom from wants, modern hedonism usually considers a man the happier the more wants he has and is able to supply.<sup>2</sup>

This practical tendency brings out the truth that it is not only by the subordination of self to circumstances, and the restriction of desire to present means of satisfaction, that the required harmony between outer and inner relations can be brought about. The other alternative is open: circumstances may be subordinated to self. For this latter alternative the theory of evolution seems really to leave room as much as for the former. It is excluded only when a one-sided emphasis is laid on the need for adaptation to environment. For evolution implies a gradually increasing heterogeneity of structure as the prelude to perfect agreement with circumstances: "the limit of heterogeneity towards which every aggregate progresses is the formation of as many specialisations and combinations of parts as there

does not  
fully repre-  
sent the  
theory of  
evolution.

<sup>1</sup> Lassalle's tirade against the "verdammte Bedürfnisslosigkeit" of the German workman is a case in point.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Lange, *Gesch. d. Materialismus*, 3d ed., ii. 458.

are specialised and combined forces to be met.”<sup>1</sup> The end of evolution is a correspondence between inner and outer which is not produced by the easy method of both being very simple, but which is consistent with, and indeed requires, the complexity and heterogeneity produced in both by constant interaction.<sup>2</sup> The greater this complexity, the more filled with sensation, emotion, and thought life is, the greater is what Spencer calls its ‘breadth.’ But, if ‘adaptation’ is still regarded as expressing the end, then, the more perfect this adaptation is, the less room seems left for change and, consequently, for progress, and the end of human conduct is placed in a state of moving equilibrium in which action takes place without a jar and without disturbing the play of external conditions.<sup>3</sup>

(b) As describing the ultimate condition of life,

This characteristic of ‘adaptation’ is looked upon by Spencer not as representing the conduct prescribed by morality in present circumstances, but as describing the ultimate condition of human life. As such, it is the foundation of his Absolute Ethics—that “final permanent code” which “alone

<sup>1</sup> Spencer, *First Principles*, p. 490.

<sup>2</sup> An aspect of Spencer's ethical theory which will be considered in the sequel: pp. 275 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. Barratt, *Physical Ethics*, p. 294, where morality is placed in “reasonable obedience to the physical laws of nature.”

admits of being definitely formulated, and so constituting ethics as a science in contrast with empirical ethics.”<sup>1</sup> The “philosophical moralist,” he tells us, “treats solely of the *straight* man. He determines the properties of the straight man; describes how the straight man comports himself; shows in what relationship he stands to other straight men; shows how a community of straight men is constituted. Any deviation from strict rectitude he is obliged wholly to ignore. It cannot be admitted into his premisses without vitiating all his conclusions. A problem in which a *crooked* man forms one of the elements is insoluble by him.”<sup>2</sup>

How, then, are we to conceive the nature or conduct of the ‘straight man’? To begin with, it is made clear that his dealings are only with straight men; for there are no ‘crooked men’ in the ideal community. “The coexistence of a perfect man and an imperfect society is impossible; and could the two coexist the resulting conduct would not furnish the ethical standard sought.”<sup>3</sup> “The ultimate man is one in whom this process [of adaptation to the social state] has gone so far as to produce a correspondence between all the promptings of his nature and all the requirements of his life as car-

complete  
correspond-  
ence with  
environ-  
ment.

<sup>1</sup> Principles of Ethics, i. 148.

<sup>2</sup> Social Statics, quoted in Principles of Ethics, i. 271.

<sup>3</sup> Principles of Ethics, i. 279.

Resultant  
absolute  
code of  
ethics

ried on in society. If so, it is a necessary implication that there exists an ideal code of conduct formulating the behaviour of the completely-adapted man in the completely-evolved society." This is the code of Absolute Ethics, whose injunctions alone are "absolutely right," and which "as a system of ideal conduct, is to serve as a standard for our guidance in solving, as well as we can, the problems of real conduct."<sup>1</sup> At the outset we were required to "interpret the more developed by the less developed";<sup>2</sup> the conclusion sets forth that the less developed is to be guided by the more developed, the real by the ideal. Now, ethics "includes all conduct which furthers or hinders, in either direct or indirect ways, the welfare of self or others."<sup>3</sup> Thus Absolute Ethics, like Relative Ethics, has two divisions, personal and social. As to the latter, Spencer formulated certain principles of justice, negative beneficence, and positive beneficence,<sup>4</sup> which were supposed to describe the harmonious co-operation of ideal men in the ideal state. These principles may perhaps be capable of a modified application to the present state of society, in which there is a conflict of interests: although Spencer's representation of them suggests the belief that they

(a) lays  
down ab-  
stract prin-  
ciples for  
relation of  
individual  
to society;

<sup>1</sup> Principles of Ethics, p. 275.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., i. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 281.

<sup>4</sup> See the examination of these by Sidgwick, Ethics of Green, Spencer, and Martineau (1902), pp. 252-312. Cf. Prof. F. W. Maitland's articles in *Mind*, O.S., viii. 354 ff., 506 ff.



are not so much guides which the ideal gives to the real, as suggestions for the construction of a Utopia gathered from the requirements of present social life. But, supposing the "harmonious co-operation" of individuals to be thus provided for, what is the personal end? and what, it might be added, is the social end, if society has any further function than regulating the relation of its units to one another? Absolute ethics does not seem to be able to give much guidance here. "A code of perfect personal conduct," we are told, "can never be made definite."<sup>1</sup> There are various types of activities, all of which may belong to lives "complete after their kinds." But yet "perfection of individual life" does imply "certain modes of action which are approximately alike in all cases, and which, therefore, become part of the subject-matter of ethics." We cannot lay down "precise rules for private conduct," but only "general requirements." And these are: to maintain the balance between waste and nutrition, to observe a relation between activity and rest, to marry and have children.<sup>2</sup> This is "how the straight man comports himself": his functions seem to be physiological only. Apart, therefore, from the suggestion thrown out that a man's function may be the realisation of a type of activity complete after its kind—a suggestion to be considered in the

(β) further  
only defines  
end of con-  
duct as  
adaptation;

<sup>1</sup> Principles of Ethics, i. 282.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 283.

sequel—all that we can say of the “completely-adapted man” would seem to be that he will be adapted to his circumstances.

(γ) cannot  
be shown to  
lead to  
happiness.

We have a right to demur if the pleasures of the final condition of equilibrium be held up to our imagination as a reason for aiming at it. That it is “the establishment of the greatest perfection and most complete happiness,”<sup>1</sup> seems an unwarrantable assumption. Yet it is through this assumption that an apparent harmony between Spencer’s hedonistic ethics and his view of the tendency of evolution is brought about. It is not at all certain that the result of perfectly adapted function would be a continuance of greatly increased pleasure. It is true that all the pains of disharmony between inner desire or feeling and outer circumstances would, in such a case, disappear; but with them also there would be lost the varied pleasures of pursuit and successful struggle. It cannot even be assumed that other pleasures would continue as intense as before. For, as acts are performed more easily, and thus with less conscious volition, they gradually pass into the background of consciousness, or out of consciousness altogether; and the pleasure accompanying them fades gradually away as they cease to occupy the attention. “Where action is perfectly automatic, feeling does

<sup>1</sup> First Principles, p. 517.

not exist.’<sup>1</sup> The so-called ‘passive’ pleasures might still remain. But the fact of effort being no longer necessary for the adjustment of inner to outer relations might have the effect of making the ‘moving equilibrium’ still called ‘life’ automatic in every detail. Indeed, if the suggestions of the ‘First Principles’ are to be carried out, it would seem that the moving equilibrium is “a transitional state on the way to complete equilibrium,”<sup>2</sup> which is another name for death.<sup>3</sup> So far, therefore, from heightened pleasure being the result of completely perfect adjustment of inner to outer relations, this adjustment would seem to reach its natural goal in unconsciousness—a conclusion which may commend itself to those of Spencer’s disciples who take a less optimistic view of life than their master.

It seems evident, therefore, that to take adaptation to environment, or self-preservation as interpreted by adaptation, as either end or criterion of conduct, is to adopt an end or criterion which cannot be defended by the plea that it will yield a maximum of happiness or pleasure. And it is almost with a feeling of relief that one finds Spencer’s confidence in the tendency of evolution

<sup>1</sup> Spencer, *Psychology*, § 212, i. 478.

<sup>2</sup> *First Principles*, p. 489.

<sup>3</sup> “A complete equilibrium of the aggregate is without life, and a moving equilibrium of the aggregate is living.”—*Principles of Sociology*, i. 109.

so far shaken as to admit of his saying that "however near to completeness the adaptation of human nature to the conditions of existence at large, physical and social, may become, it can never reach completeness."<sup>1</sup> "Adaptation to environment" must, at any rate, be kept quite distinct from any theory of ethics which takes pleasure as the end of life; and it cannot consistently determine any result as of ethical value on account of its pleasurable consequences. The goal which it sets before us, and in which human progress ends, is conformity with an external order. The modification of these external conditions by human effort is to be justified ethically by the opportunity it gives for bringing about a fuller agreement between the individual or race and its environment. The result is a stationary state of human conduct, corresponding with, or a part of, the general 'equilibration' to which, according to Spencer, all evolution tends. † But this theory, which places the end of conduct in what seems to be the actual tendency of evolution, gains no real support from this apparent harmony of ethics with general philosophy. It may be granted that the evidence of physical laws goes to show that the evolution of the solar, or even stellar, system is towards a condition in which the 'moving equilibrium' will at last pass into a form in which there is no

<sup>1</sup> Principles of Ethics, i. 254.

further sensible motion, and the concentration of matter is complete. But, to infer from this that the theory which places the end of conduct in a similar equilibrium shows the harmony of morality with the tendency of existence in general, would really involve a confusion of the two different meanings of 'end.' The end or termination of all things may be equilibrium, motionlessness, and disappearance of life, but this is no reason why the end or aim of conduct should be a similar equilibrium.

Indeed, to say that we ought to promote the end of evolution, and that this end is annihilation, is inconsistent with the postulate always implied by Spencer's ethics—the postulate that conduct should promote evolution because life is desirable,<sup>1</sup> and increase of life comes with the progress of evolution. Nor is it of any assistance to reply to this by saying that the dissolution in which evolution ends may be only the prelude to another process of evolution in which life will gradually progress till it again reaches equilibrium. For, in the first place, this is only a problematical suggestion—is not, to speak in Spencerian language, “demonstrable *a priori* by deduction from the persistence of force,” as the tendency of present evolution to equilibrium is held to be; and secondly, the new process, if it were to come about, would

<sup>1</sup> Spencer, *Principles of Ethics*, i. 26.

have to begin again the slow ascent from the lowest rung of the ladder of existence: so that, in aiding evolution towards the goal of equilibrium, we should be only guiding it to the old starting-point which has now, after many a painful struggle, been left far behind.

The concep-  
tion of social  
equilib-  
rium :

The theory that goodness consists in adaptation to environment may be put in a more complex and subtle way, but without, as it seems to me, meeting the objections already urged against it. Stress, for instance, may be laid on the fact that the social order is part, and indeed the most important part, of the environment of the individual, and that it is in his adaptation to the social order, rather than in his adaptation to the material order, that goodness consists: morality may be identified with social equilibrium.<sup>1</sup> But this view does not get rid of the former difficulties. The social order is not the whole of man's environment; society itself must be adapted to the wider environment in order to maintain its own equilibrium: so that social equilibrium depends upon this further condition. Besides, society is constituted by psychical factors; it also is a life; and social conduct, equally with individual conduct, requires a standard or criterion of goodness if one way of social activity is ever to be regarded as better than another. And if we

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Alexander, *Moral Order and Progress*, p. 295.

refuse to apply moral predicates to social action, we refute ourselves whenever we mix in public life and support a cause or an institution, while we should find it hard to explain how the good or evil which characterises individual activities ceases to apply when men act in groups.

The conception of social equilibrium thus throws no more light on the ethical problem than the conception of adaptation to environment did. The social order or environment must be assumed as good before we can say that the goodness of conduct consists in adaptation to, or equilibrium with, it. And the fact that all conduct produces changes in the environment would itself be a difficulty on this view, were it otherwise tenable. Spencer's dream of a perfect state necessarily takes the form of a stationary state; and the one great and unproved assumption that this final state is good or best is thus sufficient for his purposes. But, apart from this idea of an ultimate state of complete adaptation, it is necessary to recognise that both conduct and environment are in ceaseless change, and that the equilibrium established at any moment, even were it perfect at that moment, would be overturned at the next. Morality has been said to be "the equilibrium of social forces in an order of conduct,"<sup>1</sup> and, at the same time, it is held that "goodness is in perpetual movement:

its inability  
to yield a  
moral stan-  
dard.

<sup>1</sup> Alexander, *Moral Order and Progress*, p. 295.

so soon as it is attained it becomes evil, and a fresh standard of goodness arises.”<sup>1</sup> The equilibrium is after all but an imaginary state, the result of an imperfect and momentary view of the process: if we look a moment longer we see that the forces are moving forward towards a new distribution, itself to be displaced almost as soon as it appears. What significance is there then in continuing to say that goodness consists in such an equilibrium? We may take an instantaneous photograph of a horse as it stands motionless on the turf, or as it leaps the hurdle: in the former case the forces seem to us in equilibrium; in the latter they do not. It is the same in the progress of social life: there are periods of rest and periods of fresh endeavour; and in the former we may seem to find the equilibrium which is absent in the latter. But no reason has been given for taking the presence of equilibrium as either the same thing as, or as a test of, goodness. Besides, it is admitted that, if there is equilibrium at all, it is but for a moment: movement is the rule of life; and as we pass from the state of one moment to face the future, is there no other guide for conduct than this will-o’-the-wisp called equilibrium? “If we assume,” says Professor Alexander,<sup>2</sup>—and this may be taken as his answer to the question,—“that the change of ideals is not merely a change but a progress, we

<sup>1</sup> Moral Order and Progress, p. 290.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 291.



may describe morality as the creation of a 'better.'” But in this assumption the whole ethical question is begged. If we call the change a progress, we have thereby assumed that it is towards a 'better' state. And on what grounds can the assumption be justified? Even Spencer admitted that “the survival of the fittest is not always the survival of the best . . . the 'fittest,' throughout a wide range of cases—perhaps the widest range—are not the 'best.’”<sup>1</sup> But if change is held to be a progress and to point to a better, the assumption is made that evolution is an ethical process—that the 'fittest' which it tends to preserve are also the morally 'best.' If we do make this assumption, then the ethical conception is presupposed in our view of evolution and not derived from it. If, on the other hand, we do not make the assumption, our distinction between good and evil comes to be only a distinction between successful persistence and failure in a struggle: the good will be simply “what has come to prevail,” and the evil “that which has been rejected and defeated.”<sup>2</sup>

Further, it would seem that the theory of evolution itself is not fairly represented by a view which

(c) Insufficiency of

<sup>1</sup> *Athenæum*, August 5, 1893, p. 194a; Various Fragments, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander, *Moral Order and Progress*, pp. 306, 307.

adaptation  
as evolution-  
ist end :

emphasises the fact of adaptation to environment to the exclusion of the fact of variation. The latter is as necessary to progressive development as is the former. Adaptation to environment might seem to be most nearly complete when organism and environment were both so simple as to be hardly separate. The polype, which is scarcely different from the sea-water it inhabits, might seem by correspondence with its medium, to be near the maximum of adaptation, though at the very beginning of life. It may be solely because the environment is subject to numerous changes that the organism of simple structure cannot maintain life. But it is only through an unexplained tendency to variation that progress in organic life is possible. Perfect correspondence with the environment was not reached by simple organisms, not only on account of the want of uniformity in their surroundings, but also because, unless a race of organisms strike out a variety of characters in its different individual members, there would be no material for natural selection to work upon. Did organisms not tend to vary in function and structure, no progressive modification would be possible. Those fittest to live would be selected once for all, and all but those adapted to the environment weeded out.

tendency to  
variation in  
all organ-  
isms,

It is not necessary for our present purpose to have any definite theory of the obscure laws by

which this variability is governed. It is enough that natural selection requires the striking out of new modifications as well as the transmission of those already produced.<sup>1</sup> It may be the fact (however little the evidence in its support) that variation is, in the last resort, due to changes in surrounding circumstances, to the unequal incidence of external forces upon a finite aggregate.<sup>2</sup> But, with living bodies as now constituted, it has, at any rate as proximate cause, a twofold source. It may be due to the direct effect of external forces, or it may be caused by the energy stored up in the organism in growth.<sup>3</sup>

In man the outgo of this force is conscious; and, by means of his conscious or intelligent selection, governed by interests of various kinds, he can anticipate and modify the action of natural selection. The law that the fittest organism survives may perhaps work in man as in the lower animals, if only we give a wide enough meaning to 'fittest,' so as to admit even of the weak being made fit through the sympathy and help of the strong. Selection becomes dependent upon variations of a kind different from those in the merely animal world, so that its practical effect may be in some cases apparently reversed. We thus see how it is that even Darwin holds that in moralised societies

consciously  
directed in  
man.

<sup>1</sup> Spencer, *Biology*, i. 257.

<sup>2</sup> *First Principles*, p. 404 f.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Clifford, *Lectures and Essays*, i. 101.

“natural selection apparently effects but little.”<sup>1</sup> It is indeed contended by Schäffle<sup>2</sup> that, although circumstances differ, the law of action remains the same. Schäffle points out how, as we rise in the scale of life, especially as it is manifested in human society, the organisation becomes more delicate, and other than merely natural facts have to be taken account of, so that the fittest to live in the new social and intellectual environment is no longer the man of greatest physical strength and skill. But this view requires to be supplemented by the facts brought forward, in a previous chapter, which show that the principle of selection is no longer purely natural, but is a mode of social activity which is guided by intelligence and purpose.

The theory of natural selection as applied to the ordinary spheres of plant and animal life, may perhaps, for some purposes, neglect consideration of the fact that it presupposes a tendency to variation in the organisms whose growth it describes. But, when the variation in the behaviour of the organism becomes conscious and designed, there is thereby produced a preliminary indication or determination of the lines on which selection has to work; and the new force should be definitely recognised.

<sup>1</sup> *Descent of Man*, new ed. (1901), p. 212, cf. pp. 307, 945; cf. A. R. Wallace, *Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection* (1870), p. 330.

<sup>2</sup> *Vierteljahrsschrift f. wiss. Phil.*, i. (1877), 543 ff.

Before the theory of evolution can give a full account of the ethical in man, it must distinguish consciously-determined from merely natural action, and give an analysis of what is implied in the former. We must bear in mind that it may be the case that the ground and possibility of progress and of the efficiency of ideal ends in human conduct—which ‘adaptation to environment’ has been unable logically to explain or leave room for—are to be found in this differentiating fact of conscious activity. But we must first of all see whether, from the general characteristics implied in the facts of variation, we can extract an ethical end or any means for distinguishing between good and evil in conduct.

2. “The lower animals,” says a writer on biology, “are just as well organised for the purposes of their life as the higher are for theirs. The tape-worm is relatively quite as perfect as the man, and distinguished from him by many superior capabilities.”<sup>1</sup> It is incorrect to look upon the evolution of animal life as working along one line only, so that the different kinds of living beings can be arranged, as it were, in an order of merit, in which the organisation of the higher animals plainly excels that of the lower. The conditions of life are manifold and various enough to permit of

2. End suggested by this tendency to variation :

<sup>1</sup> Rolph, *Biol. Probl.*, p. 33.

the existence of many species equally perfect in relation to their different environments. The fact that we are still able to speak of one species or one animal as higher than another, is not owing to the one being better adapted to its environment than the other, but is identified with "the amount of differentiation and specialisation of the several organs in each being."<sup>1</sup> Even Spencer, for whom equilibrium is the goal of life, implicitly admits that 'adaptation' alone is not the end for human action, by his doctrine that the degree of evolution may be measured by the complexity of the adjustments it effects between organism and environment. The end, therefore, it may be said, is no longer the mere 'self-preservation' found in adaptation to environment, but the 'self-development' which implies temporary disharmony between organism and surroundings.

(c) pre-  
scribes self-  
development  
rather than  
self-preser-  
vation,

For 'self-preservation' and 'self-development,' though frequently spoken of as identical, are really distinct and often opposed notions—the former denoting a tendency to persist in one's present state of being, while the latter implies constant change. It may be held, however, that, for an organism such as man to persist in his state of being, implies modification of his faculties, and that this modification involves development. For any organism to exist apart from change is, of

<sup>1</sup> Darwin, *Origin of Species*, new ed. (1901), p. 152.

course, impossible. Life is only known to us as a series of changes. But that change does not necessarily mean development or 'change to a higher condition.' Degradation is as well known a fact as development; and, between the two, there is room for a state of existence of which it is difficult to say whether it improves or deteriorates. And, whatever may be intended by the phrase, 'self-preservation' points to a state of this kind rather than to an improving condition. The notion of 'self-development' has therefore a richer content than that of 'self-preservation'; but just on this account it cannot be explained by a reference to the nature of things as they are.

It is true that self-development can only go on by means of a continuous process of adjustment; but it is also necessary for it that this tendency to adaptation should be continually hindered from becoming complete or lapsing into equilibrium. It is here that the function of variation comes in. On the one side there is this tendency to vary after a fashion often without any apparent regard to external conditions; on the other side, there is the action of the external conditions selecting and favouring those variations which bring the organism into closer correspondence with them. The wide range over which the theory of natural selection applies is due to the fact that the environment

thus taking  
account of  
variability

is never uniform and never constant, so that modifications on the part of the organism have a chance of suiting its varied and changing character. Its changes, moreover, are often the result not so much of any absolute alteration in external circumstances, as of a new relation between them and living beings having been brought about. For the enormous reproductive faculty of most organisms makes them multiply so rapidly as to press ever more and more closely against the limit of subsistence, and thus to produce competition for the means of living. Hence the fresh lines of development originated by each organism have to be tested by their correspondence with a constantly changing medium. The altered circumstances give the modifications which organisms are for ever striking out an opportunity of perpetuating themselves.

which complicates the tendency to correspondence with environment,

By each new variation the existing relation between organism and environment is disturbed. The variation may, however, prove its utility at once by a more exact correspondence than before with the requirements of external conditions. But, in what are called the higher grades of life, variations from the type are sometimes not immediately useful, although they may ultimately become most advantageous.<sup>1</sup> Were it not for

<sup>1</sup> Thus Darwin, *Descent of Man*, p. 76, speaking of the 'advantage to man' it must have been 'to become a biped,' says: "The



the remarkable power of persistence possessed by the higher animals, the modified organism would be unable to hold its own. The great majority of such variations do, as a matter of fact, soon disappear, because unable to prove their utility. But others of them, either by the power they give the organism to mould circumstances to itself, or by their appropriateness to the greater complexity which comes with the increased number of living organisms, and the more delicate readjustment thus required, prove of greater advantage to the organism than the faculties simply adapted to the preceding state of relative equilibrium. The higher adjustment of life to its surroundings, which marks each state of advancing evolution, had its beginning in the rupture of the original simpler harmony that previously existed.

If we compare human conduct with that of animals lower in the organic scale, it becomes especially in human conduct,

hands and arms could hardly have become perfect enough to have manufactured weapons, or to have hurled stones and spears with a true aim, as long as they were habitually used for locomotion and for supporting the whole weight of the body ; or, as before remarked, as long as they were especially fitted for climbing trees." The hands had to lose their dexterity for the latter purposes before they could acquire the more delicate adjustments necessary for skill in the former. The transition was of course a gradual one ; but the initial variations required would seem to have been a first unfavourable to man's chances in the struggle for existence, though it was through them that he rose to his place at the summit of the organic scale.

evident that there is a broad difference between the two in this, that actions in the former are purposed, performed with a definite end in view; whereas, in the latter, they seem to be the result of blind impulse, and there are slight, if any, traces of purpose. In activity of the latter kind, natural selection works in the ordinary way by exterminating the animals whose behaviour is not suited to their environment. But actions done with a view to an end may anticipate the verdict of this natural law. The agent may see that conduct of a particular kind would conduce to the promotion of life, while conduct of a different kind would render him less fit to live; and, as a consequence, actions of the former kind may be chosen. In this way development may be anticipated, and the present order of affairs may be disturbed, more or less forcibly, in order to bring about a foreseen better state of things.

We are thus able to see more clearly how it is that the theory of evolution when applied to ethics, may be thought to have different and conflicting results. The first result is the view already criticised, 'adaptation to environment,' which corresponds to the notion of self-preservation. But this end, as we have seen, only takes one factor of evolution into consideration—neglects the tendency to variation which all evolution postulates, and which, in the higher

organisms, becomes purposive. The other end which seems to be suggested by the theory of evolution takes account of this tendency to variation, and may be said to correspond to the notion of self-development; but this end it is harder to define. Adaptation may, perhaps, be understood by a reference to the environment to which life is to be adapted. This involves a knowledge of the conditions of the environment, but nothing more. Development can be measured by no such standard. On the one hand it implies an independent, or relatively independent, tendency to variation. On the other hand, however, it is necessary that the disharmony with environment, in which this tendency to variation may begin, should not be excessive and should not be permanent; for without a certain amount of adaptation to environment no organism can live. The extent of initial disharmony which is possible, or is useful, varies according to the versatility of the faculties of each individual organism, and to its place in the scale of being; but throughout all existence it is true that want of adaptation beyond a certain varying degree is fatal: "a mode of action entirely alien to the prevailing modes of action, cannot be successfully persisted in—must eventuate in death of self, or posterity, or both." There are certain conditions in the

<sup>1</sup> Spencer, *Principles of Ethics*, i. 280.

environment which correspond with the essential requirements of organic life; and without adaptation to them life cannot be maintained.

(b) Standard  
for measur-  
ing develop-  
ment

By what standard, then, can we measure development? We have already seen, from the 'formula,' as it is called, or definition, of evolution, that it implies an advance to a state of increased coherence, definiteness, and heterogeneity, by the double process of differentiation of parts, and integration of these parts into a whole by the formation of definite relations among them to one another. The notions of coherence amongst parts and of increased definiteness of function and structure are easily understood. But the heterogeneity postulated is a more complex notion,—has, in the first place, a double reference, "is at the same time a differentiation of the parts from each other and a differentiation of the consolidated whole from the environment";<sup>1</sup> and secondly, is manifested in living beings in increased complexity of every kind—of structure, form, chemical composition, specific gravity, temperature, and self-mobility.<sup>2</sup> Can we then apply this at once to ethics, and say that the most developed—which the evolutionist assumes to be the most moral—conduct is that which is most definite, coherent, and heterogeneous? This doctrine has at least the

<sup>1</sup> Spencer, *Biology*, i. 149.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, i. 144.

merit of not leaving out of sight so fundamental a characteristic of evolution as the tendency to variation; and, without being consistently held to, it is the burden of much of Spencer's Ethics, where it is illustrated and defended with great ingenuity.

That moral conduct is distinguished by definiteness and coherence—that it works towards a determinate end, and that its various actions are in agreement with one another and parts of a whole—may be admitted. But this is at most a merely formal description of what is meant by morality in conduct. To say that conduct must be a coherent whole, and must seek a determinate end by appropriate means, leaves unsettled the question as to what this end should be, or what means are best fitted to attain it. But, when we go on to say that as conduct is more varied in act,<sup>1</sup> more heterogeneous in motive,<sup>2</sup> it is higher in the moral scale, we seem to have got hold of something which may be a guide for determining the ethical end. The mark of what is higher in evolution,

found in  
degree of  
complexity  
of act and  
motive.

<sup>1</sup> Spencer, *Principles of Ethics*, i. 71: "Briefly, then, if the conduct is the best possible on every occasion, it follows that as the occasions are endlessly varied the acts will be endlessly varied to suit—the heterogeneity in the combination of motions will be extreme."

<sup>2</sup> Spencer, *Principles of Ethics*, i. 106: "The acts characterised by the more complex motives and the more involved thoughts have all along been of higher authority for guidance."

and consequently in morality, will be greater heterogeneity or complexity.<sup>1</sup>

This conclusion follows from an attempt not merely to treat "moral phenomena as phenomena of evolution," but also to find the "ultimate interpretations" of ethics "only in those fundamental truths which are common to all" the sciences, physical, biological, psychological, sociological.<sup>2</sup> Now the fundamental truths which these sciences have in common are those only which are most abstract. But as we pass from mere relations between matter and motion to life, and from life to self-consciousness, we do not merely add to these fundamental truths certain others which are not fundamental: we find that things are not merely more complex, but are changed in aspect and nature. Even though it be true that the new phenomena may still admit of analysis into the old simpler terms, and that life, mind, and society may be interpreted as redistributions of matter and motion,<sup>3</sup> it must yet at least be admitted that the change passed through is one similar to those which Mill compared to chemical composition: the new compound differs fundamentally in mode of action from the elements out of which it was formed.

Difficulties  
of the  
theory :

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Clifford, *Lectures and Essays*, i. 94 f., where a similar definition is given in answer to the question, "What is the meaning of *better*?"

<sup>2</sup> Spencer, *Principles of Ethics*, i. 63.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Spencer, *First Principles*, p. 566.

Now, in saying that the most complex adjustments of acts to ends are the highest kinds of conduct, and that we should be guided by the more complex in preference to simpler motives, this obvious difficulty is passed over. It is true that Spencer, in chapters rich in suggestion, and filled with skillfully chosen illustrations, has passed in review the various aspects of conduct according as we look at it from the point of view of the physical environment, of life, of mind, and of society. But, when these different aspects are brought together and compared, it becomes clear that the attempt to judge conduct by reference to the 'fundamental truth' that evolution implies an advance towards greater complexity, must necessarily end in failure.<sup>1</sup>

In the first place, there is a notable discrepancy (a)antinomy between the biological and the sociological aspect. produced by it between the social and individual ends; For the complete development of the individual life implies that every function should be fulfilled, and that its fulfilment should interfere with the performance of no other function. "The performance of every function is, in a sense, a moral obligation." "The ideally moral man . . . is one in

<sup>1</sup> So far as the following criticism may appear to apply to Spencer, and not merely to a possible way of defining moral conduct, it is necessary to bear in mind the words of his preface to the *Principles of Ethics*: "With a view to clearness, I have treated separately some correlative aspects of conduct, drawing conclusion either of which becomes untrue if divorced from the other."

whom the functions of all kinds are duly fulfilled,"—that is to say, "discharged in degrees duly adjusted to the conditions of existence."<sup>1</sup> A fully evolved life is marked by multiplicity and complexity of function. And, if from the individual we pass to the social organism, we find that the same truth holds. The state, or organised body of individuals, has many functions to perform; but it can only perform them in the most efficient way through the functions of its individual members being specialised. From the social point of view, therefore, the greatest possible division of labour is a mark of the most evolved and perfect community. And this division of labour implies that each individual, instead of performing every function of which he is capable, should be made to restrict himself to that at which he is best, so that the community may be the gainer from the time and exertion that are saved, and the skill that is produced, by the most economic expenditure of individual talent. Thus social perfection appears to imply a condition of things inconsistent with that development of one's whole nature which, from the biological point of view, has just been defined as a characteristic of the ideally moral man. It seems, indeed, inevitable that any such abstract preliminary notion of development as that which would test it by increase of complexity must fail if such a

<sup>1</sup> Spencer, *Principles of Ethics*, i. 75 f.



case as this where there is no question between the competing claims of two phenomena on the same level, but where harmony is wanted between the different aspects the same phenomena present when looked at from the point of view of the individual and from the point of view of the whole.

There is still greater difficulty in applying this criterion, when we come to the psychological aspect of morality. According to Spencer, "the acts characterised by the more complex motives and the more involved thoughts, have all along been of higher authority for guidance."<sup>1</sup> But the later or more advanced in mental evolution is not always more complex in structure; for it is a characteristic of mental development that the processes by which a result has been arrived at gradually disappear on account of the diminished attention they receive, so that there remains what is, so far as psychical structure is concerned, a simple mental state. Complexity of structure and indirectness of origin are thus really two different characteristics of states of mind, which frequently go together, but frequently part company.<sup>2</sup> When Spencer, accordingly, goes on to say<sup>3</sup> that "for the better preser-

(β) its psychological aspect

confounds complexity of structure with indirectness of origin,

<sup>1</sup> Principles of Ethics, i. 106.

<sup>2</sup> Although Spencer holds that representativeness varies as definiteness, and measures complexity, including the complexity implied by increasing heterogeneity.—Principles of Psychology, ii. 516 f. †

<sup>3</sup> Principles of Ethics, i. 113.

vation of life the primitive simple presentative feelings must be controlled by the later-evolved compound and representative feelings," he is really passing to a different standard without giving up the former. The sympathy with injured Zulus or Afghans so lavishly expressed by Spencer<sup>1</sup> may be a more indirect, representative, or re-representative feeling, than the sentiments which led to British expeditions, and, as such, may be more to be commended. But it would be rash to say that sympathy with the 'British interests' supposed to be at stake—interests of commerce, and of the balance of political power, as well as those arising from the subtle effect of national prestige—is less complex than the feeling of sympathy with a people dispossessed of its territory. The latter feeling may be more indirect or representative, as implying an imaginative appropriation of the circumstances of another community; but, so far as structure is concerned, it is composed of far fewer and simpler component elements than the feeling for British interests.

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standard.

Nor, on the other hand, can we allow ourselves to take refuge in the conclusion that, if the more complex emotion cannot be held to be better morally, then that which is later in evolution may at least be regarded as of higher authority than the earlier evolved feeling. According to Spencer the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Principles of Sociology*, ii. 725.

man who obtains by fraud the money to support his family is to be condemned, because, although we admit the claim his family have upon him, "we regard as of superior authority the feelings which respond to men's proprietary claims—feelings which are re-representative in a higher degree and refer to more remote diffused consequences."<sup>1</sup> But, were this the ground of distinction, we ought also to regard the feeling prompting a man to distribute his fortune in any foolish enterprise 'as of superior authority' to those which prompt him to support his family, if only the former are 're-representative in a higher degree,' and their consequences more 'remote' and 'diffused.' Many of the greatest evils which infect social life and warp the moral feelings of men are evils which are only possible as the result of a highly advanced civilisation and a refined and delicate organisation of the mind. The factitious sentiments raised by a subtle casuistry with the effect of confusing the ordinary distinctions of right and wrong are, in almost all cases, more indirect and re-representative than the feelings in harmony with the moral consciousness of the community which they set aside in the individual conscience. So obvious, indeed, are objections of this kind—objections, that is to say, taken from the impossibility of so applying the criterion as to construct a workable system of

<sup>1</sup> Principles of Ethics, i. 123..

morals—that Spencer virtually relinquishes his own theory, talking of it as true only “on the average,”<sup>1</sup> and even allowing that it is in some cases suicidal.<sup>2</sup>

As it cannot be held that the more complex in evolution is of greater authority than the less complex, nor that the later in evolution has such authority over the earlier, we must admit that the so-called ‘fundamental characteristics’ of evolution which find a place in its definition or formula, are unable to determine its value in an ethical regard. The richness of life, physical, intellectual, and social, has indeed been produced only by a long course of development, and by the assimilation of many various elements into a complex organisation; but its value cannot be measured either by the test of mechanical complexity or by the length of time it has taken to evolve. We must therefore seek some other method of giving a meaning to evolution in the region of moral worth; and we find Spencer himself really falling back in his discussion on the more general answer to our question, that the end of evolution is life: “evolution becomes the highest possible when the conduct simultaneously achieves the greatest totality of life in self, offspring, and fellow-men.”<sup>3</sup> Since it appears, then, that the

<sup>1</sup> *Principles of Ethics*, i. 107, 129.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, i. 110.

<sup>3</sup> *Principles of Ethics*, i. 25; cf. Lange, *Ges. d. Mat.*, ii. 247. Lange's statement is noteworthy: “Die menschliche Vernunft

characteristic of complexity or variety is as unsatisfactory a criterion of morality as the notion of 'adaptation to environment' was found to be, we must ask for some further interpretation of the notion of 'development' or 'increase of life' when regarded as the end of conduct.

3. The ethics of evolution—in whatever form we have as yet found it—has always proceeded on the assumption that life is desirable, and that it has a value which makes its pursuit and promotion a reasonable moral end. How this fundamental ethical assumption<sup>1</sup> is to be justified, I do not at present enquire. But the question must now be faced—What is meant by 'life' when we say that its 'increase' or 'development' is the moral end, and speak of its 'greatest totality' in a way that implies that it admits of quantitative measurement? The biological definition of life is itself a matter of dispute. But, even were such a definition as that proposed by Spencer agreed to, it would be impossible to take it as a standard for human conduct. The very generality which may

3. Further attempt to define development or increase of life as the moral standard.

Biological definition of life insufficient:

kennt kein anderes Ideal, als die möglichste Erhaltung und Vervollkommnung des Lebens, welches einmal begonnen hat, verbunden mit der Einschränkung von Geburt und Tod."

<sup>1</sup> The "endeavour to further evolution, especially that of the human race" is put forward as a "new duty" by F. Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development* (1883), p. 337. See below, pp. 320 ff.

make it fit to stand as a definition, or at least abstract description, of life, renders it at the same time incapable of serving as a criterion by which the various modes of the manifestation of life may be judged. One point, however, generally emphasised by the theory of evolution, may—to simplify the argument—be admitted. The life which human conduct ‘ought’ to increase is not merely that of one individual man, but the whole life of the community—‘self, offspring, and fellow-men’—with which the individual life is bound up. The theory of evolution has shown how the growth of the individual has been so dependent upon that of the whole body of society that it is impossible to separate their interests. At the same time, no complete identity has been brought about, and it remains one of the greatest difficulties of any empirical theory to harmonise their competing claims. For argument’s sake, however, and to admit of the quality of the end being investigated apart from considerations as to the method of distribution, the question may be discussed as if natural selection had produced complete solidarity between the life of the individual and that of the race.

What criterion have we, then, of the development of human nature or life? The answer at once suggests itself that the higher evolution of life can be accurately measured by the amount of pleasure got by living beings. But this view has been examined

in the preceding chapter, and found to be unsupported by sufficient evidence; so that we are driven to seek for some non-hedonistic criterion that will give meaning to the phrase 'development' or 'increase of life,' when prescribed as the ethical end.

Nor is the matter made any clearer by saying that the 'health' of society is the end we ought to promote.<sup>1</sup> This has been put forward as an interpretation of the hedonistic principle, which brings that principle into agreement with the theory of evolution. As such, however, it seems open to fatal objections. Given as an explanation of 'pleasure,' it falls back upon the notion of 'life'; for health can only be defined as that which conduces to continued and energetic life. Further than this, there is a special difficulty in adopting health as the proximate end where pleasure is the ultimate end. Even if we could assert that health always leads to pleasure, it is not evident that it is better known, or more easily made the end, than pleasure. For of present pleasure we have a

Health as  
the end  
either used  
to interpret  
pleasure,

<sup>1</sup> Darwin, *Descent of Man*, p. 185; Stephen, *Science of Ethics*, p. 366. Dr Hutchison Stirling also has suggested Health as a practical principle to be set against the anarchy of individualism. But with him it is not an empirical generalisation of the tendency of evolution. It is as "the outward sign of freedom, the realisation of the universal will," that "health may be set at once as sign and as goal of the harmonious operation of the whole system—as sign and as goal of a realisation of life."—*Secret of Hegel*, ii. 554.

standard in our own consciousness from which there is no appeal. And, although the value of a series of pleasures is much harder to estimate, there is also no slight difficulty in saying what will promote the efficiency or health of an organism. Besides, the question arises whether health really corresponds with pleasure; and this is, in another form, the question which has been already answered in the negative,—whether life can be measured by pleasure.

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On the other hand, if 'health' is to be taken not as an explanation of or means to pleasure, but as a substitute for the notion of 'life,' then we hardly get beyond our original terms. 'Health' must be interpreted simply as that which leads to strong and continued life: so that the only information to be got from the new term is that the life we are to promote must be vigorous and long; and this was already implied in saying that it is the increase or development of life that is the end. It will not do to identify the notion with the mere balance of physiological functions which, in common language, appropriates to itself the term 'health.' We must include the health of the soul as well as the health of the body, and the health of society as well as the health of the soul. The balance of mental and social, as well as of physiological, functions, is implied in the complex life of whose evolution we form a part. To say that we are to promote this



balance of various functions is to say nothing more than that we are to promote the life into which physical and mental and social factors enter. The attempt to arrive at an end for conduct, by consideration of the characteristics of evolution, has been made without success. It has been found, too, that 'development' or 'increase of life' does not admit of translation into the language of hedonism: and the question thus arises, How we are to define this end, which we are unable to interpret in terms of pleasure?

What meaning can be given to the notion 'increase of life' as the end of conduct, without interpreting life in terms of pleasure? Can we, the question may be put, reach a 'natural' good as distinct from 'sensible good' or pleasure? We must discard at the outset any such 'rational' view of nature as gave colour to the Stoic doctrine by identifying nature with the universal reason. And we must equally avoid the doctrine that reason regulative of conduct is manifested in the constitution of man either in a distinct faculty, such as 'conscience,' or in the due regulation of the various impulses. Trendelenburg's teleological conception of human nature, for instance, implies a rational element which could not be got from the causal sequence traced by evolution.<sup>1</sup> For he determines the essence of man by reference to

Ways of determining increase of life or natural good,

<sup>1</sup> *Naturrecht auf dem Grunde der Ethik*, 2d ed., 1868.

the inner end of his constitution, and postulates an organic unity of impulses which, in the form of conscience, protests against self-seeking action on the part of any single impulse. But no other hierarchy of motives can be admitted here than that produced by the natural law of evolution; and this law can only show how one impulse, or class of impulses, has become more authoritative, by showing how it has become stronger or more persistent: the other methods of evolving this authority on the basis of naturalism, do so by means of the pleasurable or painful consequences of motives and actions.

either subjective or objective.

There are two ways in which, on most or all ethical theories, the attempt may be made to distinguish 'good' from 'bad' conduct. We may either look to a subjective principle as giving the means of distinction, or we may test conduct by its conformity with an objective standard. If we like to make use of the terms self-preservation and self-development, then these may refer either to the subjective impulse which urges man to preserve or develop his life, or to some objective standard for estimating actions according as they actually tend to prolong life or enrich it. Both these possibilities are open to the theory of evolution. Although the subjective impulse is, of course, a property of the individual, it may be the result of the whole course of social development, and thus take in others as well as self in the range of its

application. It is therefore necessary to examine both methods of determination with some care, especially as we are in no little danger of reaching an illusory appearance of conclusiveness by allowing the subjective standard to rest on the objective, and the objective, in turn, on the subjective.

To begin with the subjective side. It may be thought that we can point to some impulse, tendency, motive, or class of motives in the individual mind by following which the evolution of life will be promoted, and that we are thus able to solve the question of practical ethics, though our conception of what the evolution of life connotes may still be in want of exact definition. As already pointed out, such an impulse (unless it depends on an objective standard) must carry its own authority with it by its strength or persistency. The case would, of course, be perfectly simple, if we could assert that the carrying out of all impulses in one's nature was to be approved as tending to the development of life. Could this assertion be made, there might be no difficulty in ethics, or rather, there might be no ethics at all, because there would be no difficulty in conduct. It is obvious, however, that the development of one natural tendency often conflicts with that of another in the same individual, as well as with the tendencies of other individuals. The course of evolution has no doubt tended to modify, though it has not rooted

(a) Subjective standard : most persistent impulses ;

out, the impulses which are most prejudicial to individual and social welfare. But the increase of wants as well as satisfactions which it has brought about in human nature makes it doubtful whether it has on the whole tended to diminish the conflict of motives.

implies distinction between permanent and transient self;

Again, when it is said that a man should "be himself," or that this is his "strongest tendency,"<sup>1</sup> there is an implicit reference to a distinction between a permanent and a transient, or a better and a worse, self; and it seems to be imagined that this distinction can be reduced to difference in degrees of strength. But evolution has not enabled us to obviate Butler's objection to taking the 'strongest tendency'—meaning by this the tendency which is any time strongest—as representing 'nature.' For it is an undeniable fact that the tendency which for a time is the strongest—it may even be that which is strongest throughout an individual life—frequently leads to a diminution of vital power on the part of the agent, as well as to interference with the free exercise of the vital powers of others. Some advantage is gained, perhaps, by substituting for 'strongest' the nearly equivalent phrase 'most persistent' tendency. All those impulses which have in the past served to promote life have been chosen out and stored up as a sort of permanent basis for the human fabric; whereas other impulses, not so

<sup>1</sup> Cf. E. Simcox, *Natural Law*, p. 97.

advantageous in their effects, have a less permanent influence, though they are not less real. The more regular or persistent class of impulses may, therefore (the idea is), be taken as representing the course of the evolution by which they have been produced.

To a large extent this distinction of two classes of impulses is justified. There seems no doubt that the social, and what are usually termed moral, feelings have a tendency to return into consciousness after any temporary depression or exclusion, which is not shared by some of the feelings with which they most commonly conflict. Other impulses, however, not usually classed as moral, share this characteristic of persistency or recurrence. "The wish for another man's property," says Darwin, "is as persistent a desire as any that can be named." The selfish feelings have obviously this persistent character. But an evolutionist may perhaps maintain that it is one of the defects of ordinary moral opinion that it depreciates the necessity and value for life of the selfish feelings, just because they are so strong as to stand in need of no encouragement. And it is not necessary that the evolutionist morality should agree at all points with ordinary moral opinion or moral intuition. It recognises, or ought to recognise, the agency of immoral as well as moral forces, admitting that it is by the action of both of these that man as he is at present has been produced,

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non-moral  
impulses in  
the former,

although the principle of the survival of the fittest has tended, though by no means uniformly, towards the elimination of the immoral factor. We may admit, therefore, that there is a pressure on the will of the average individual towards certain kinds of conduct rather than others, or, put more precisely, that while all acts are performed in consequence of pressure on the will, the pressure towards certain kinds of acts is a permanent force which, although overcome for the time, always tends to reassert itself, while the tendency towards other acts inconsistent with these is more intermittent and variable, and does not reassert itself in the same way. But this subjective experience is so limited in accuracy and extent as to be an unfit test of morality.

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In the first place, selfish conduct is as necessary for the preservation and development of man as altruistic conduct, and must therefore have given rise to an equally great and persistent pressure on the will: so that the subjective criterion of persistency leaves untouched what is often regarded as the most difficult question of morals, the balance of social and individual claims. In the second place, this subjective tendency is only a recurrence of antecedent advantageous characteristics, and does not lead us beyond the *status quo*, so that, if any progress is to be made in the future, it will be possible only through the pressure of new external conditions: no function is left for any ethical idea

which points beyond past and present habits of action. In the third place, subjective tendency only enables us to say generally that some acts or tendencies are more persistent than others, without giving any further description of what sort of acts these are. Were these tendencies or impulses a perfect guide to conduct, this defect would be of little practical consequence. It would prevent our having a definite ethical theory only in circumstances in which no ethical theory would be likely to be asked for. But the line between the more and less persistent motives is a vague and shifting one. The impulses which are the residua of advantageous ancestral actions are counteracted by other impulses, residua of actions which would not be counted as moral, though we inherit tendencies to them because they formed a real part of our ancestral activity. If we are to get to any sort of moral criterion, therefore, we stand in need of some characteristic by which to distinguish the one class of tendencies from the other. And as the only subjective characteristic is that of strength or persistency, and this has been found insufficient, an objective standard is shown to be necessary.

The impossibility of the subjective test doing duty alone without support from some objective criterion, is practically acknowledged by the writer who has discussed this part of the subject with greater penetration than any other investigator on

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the same lines. "The average man," it is said, "feels the pressure upon his own individual will of all the unknown natural sequence of motive which caused his ancestors to do on the whole more often the right thing than the wrong"<sup>1</sup>—or, as we must read it without objective assumption, "to do on the whole more often one class of acts than another." The right must be held to be simply that to which this "special feeling in the subject is directed," and it therefore becomes necessary "to discover what description of acts inspire this feeling."<sup>2</sup> Thus, with greater facility than would be permitted to a critic, we are made to pass from the subjective to the objective method of determination.

(b) Objective  
standard :

The question, What is right? is thus relinquished for the question, What is good? Good is said to be of three kinds—natural, sensible, and moral. But as by sensible good is meant pleasure,<sup>3</sup> and pleasure is not the end, and as by moral good is meant "the pursuit of natural good under difficulties,"<sup>4</sup> it follows that natural good is the end we seek. We have thus to determine, as exactly as may be, this objective standard called natural good. It is interpreted in two ways, which, however, may be "not necessarily inconsistent": (a) "the perfection of the type as it is," and

<sup>1</sup> Simcox, *Natural Law*, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.



( $\beta$ ) "the absolute abundance and variety of vital power."<sup>1</sup>

This phrase, 'the perfection of the type as it is,' is somewhat misleading. When 'the perfection of the type' is said to be the end, we naturally regard the type as something that needs to be brought to perfection, and *ex hypothesi* is not perfect at present, or 'as it is.' But if 'the perfection of the type *as it is*' is the standard, this implies, unless the standard itself is faulty, that the type is already perfect, and, therefore, that the perfection spoken of is the characteristic of a thing which conforms to the type, and not something to which the type has to conform. This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that imperfection is defined as "only departed from the class type."<sup>2</sup> Plainly, then, the objective standard meant is conformity to the type. What, then, is the type? Concerning things made by art the answer is easy. The type, as Stephen puts it, represents the "maximum of efficiency,"<sup>3</sup> or, as we may say, is that which most fully realises the purpose for which the thing was formed. The best bow is that which shoots truest and farthest with a relatively small expenditure of strength by the archer; that which best realises the purpose of a bow is the typical bow. A similar explanation

( $\alpha$ ) Conformity to the type.

The type defined as what best serves its purpose,

<sup>1</sup> Simcox, *Natural Law*, p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>3</sup> *Science of Ethics*, p. 76.

of types may be given regarding animals modified by artificial selection. The typical pointer or hunter can be defined from this teleological point of view; and, as long as people lived in the belief that all things were made for man, it was natural to fix the type of each class by reference to the human purpose it could best subserve. So also, as long as people think that, whether all things were made for man or not, all things may be made use of by him, there will be a tendency towards the same anthropomorphic interpretation of types. If, then, the typical products of art, and, to a large extent, the typical products of nature, are those which best serve human purposes, or best correspond with human ideals, how shall we define the typical man himself—the type which it is our perfection to conform to? “Every reasoning agent,” it may perhaps be allowed,<sup>1</sup> “represents a certain type”; but the type can no longer be defined merely as “maximum of efficiency,” for it is the end or purpose of this efficiency which now requires determination. In defining the typical man, we must have no idea of final cause or purpose which is not rooted in the nature of his organism.

How, then, shall we now determine the type in conformity to which perfection consists?<sup>2</sup> €

<sup>1</sup> Stephen, *Science of Ethics*, p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> Even were we to succeed in getting a satisfactory view of the

The first answer to this seems to be, that the type is what is normal,—“what we have learned to regard as the normal development of objects belonging to” the class.<sup>2</sup> But the normal may have either of two meanings. It may, in the first place, mean the usual or customary. This, however, would make the typical man mean the ordinary or average man; and the ideal of conformity to the type would be reduced to doing the customary thing, and not trying to be better than one’s neighbours. But it is evident that this stationary morality does not represent properly what is fundamental in the theory of evolution: “whatever other duties men may acknowledge, they do not look upon it as a duty to preserve the species *in statu quo*.”<sup>3</sup> If natural science teaches one thing more clearly than another, it is that the type, like the individual, is not permanent, but the subject of gradual modifications. If the type is what is normal, we must mean by ‘normal’ something else than customary. But the only other meaning of the word seems to imply a reference to a rule—either a rule imposed from without, or an inner constitution or order. If the former alternative is adopted, then we may use another definition given type, we should still have to leave room for the individuality of each *persch*, which is such that his function must differ in a manner corresponding to his peculiar nature and surroundings (cf. Lotze, *Grundzüge der praktischen Phil.*, p. 13 f.)

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<sup>2</sup> Simcox, *Natural Law*, p. 88.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

by Stephen, and say that "the typical organism is . . . that organism which is best fitted for all the conditions of life, or, in other words, which has the strongest vitality."<sup>1</sup> In this way we have to fall back either on the notion of 'adaptation to environment,' or on that of 'strongest vitality'—the notion we are seeking to interpret. If we adopt the other meaning which the reference to a rule may convey, then we are met by the fact that the inner order or constitution which is to be our guide, can (from our present empirical point of view) mean nothing different from the line of development. And as we have already seen that it is unsatisfactory to interpret this as equivalent to adaptation to environment, or to increase of definiteness, coherence, and heterogeneity, this principle of conformity to the type is reduced to the general principle which we have been attempting to define more exactly—*increase of life*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Science of Ethics, p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> A view similar to the above has been put forward again in the article "Ethics" contributed to the tenth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (vol. xxviii.) by Professor J. A. Stewart. According to his statement the Type is "the end in relation to which all objects of human endeavour have 'reality' and 'value,' and are, and ought to be, desired" (p. 300). The Type is thus said to be the measure both of the 'reality' of all objects of human endeavour, that is, of the degree in which they are desired, and of their 'value,' or the degree in which they ought to be desired. But as long as these two things are not distinguished, the ethical problem is only obscured. It is only because the things that are desired are not always things that

Thus the first determination of natural good as "perfection of the type" is seen to reduce itself to the second, "absolute abundance and

( $\beta$ ) Abundance and variety of vital power,

ought to be desired—because all that is 'real' does not also possess 'value'—that the ethical question arises at all. And yet it is difficult to grasp this distinction in Professor Stewart's exposition either of what he calls the Particular Theory of Conduct or of his General Theory of Conduct. The former (he says) has to do with the conduct which "seems to be practical in an eminent sense—moral conduct, which may be defined as conduct willed by members of the social system for the sake of that system." Strictly interpreted this distinguishes the conduct in question not merely from non-moral conduct, or conduct unrelated to the social system, but also from immoral, in the sense of contra-social, conduct. But it is doubtful whether this is the meaning intended by the author. If it is not, nothing is said relevant to the distinction sought. If it is, the theory is intelligible enough, the social system being taken as the standard of moral value. But this standard does not allow for the progressive improvement of the social system itself; and perhaps the theory also overlooks the fact that society is simply an organisation of individuals, and that social activities, or individual activities combined, are as much in need of a standard as individual activities in isolation. The General Theory of Conduct has a wider outlook: "from 'man in the state' our range of view must be extended till we can survey 'man in the cosmos'" (p. 301 a). This may be dealt with in either of two ways. The positive method will give a history and description of man; the other method "will call attention to the significance of his being what he now is." The latter method is non-evolutionist and need not concern us here, especially as Professor Stewart regards it as merely imaginative. The positive way is restricted to 'some particular civilisation'; further (although this is not said), it should describe that civilisation as it was or is. And the contribution of the theory of evolution is to remind the moralist that "the type is not final, and, at the same time, that the relations involved are so complicated that calculation of what it will become even in the comparatively near future is not to be attempted" (p. 301 b).

variety of vital power." For the additional statement, which makes the highest excellence consist in "conformity to the type as it is going to be, but as, except in a few chosen specimens, it is not yet discernible to be,"<sup>1</sup> is unsatisfactory. For to those 'few chosen specimens' the end would seem to be simply to remain as they are—a conclusion which is hardly consistent for a writer who regards morality as a continual progress towards a higher life, a process of 'climbing.'<sup>2</sup> And, for the generality of men, there must be some standard for determining what is 'going to

Consequently, 'ends' or 'ideals' are to be avoided: "the complexity and mobility of the relations between organism and environment, as understood by Darwinism, are such as to preclude entirely the idea of 'final correspondence'" (p. 305 b). The ethical question remains, What is the standard for conduct now? How are we to define the Type which gives 'value,' as well as 'reality,' to all objects of human endeavour? The "achieved result," as "developed 'up to date,'" is spoken of as this Type (p. 306 a). But this "achieved result," with its mixture of good and evil in impulse, character, and attainment, is just the moralist's problem, not its solution. Professor Stewart seems to feel the difficulty; for he says that the Type "expresses itself in the successive ideals of slight betterment by which the moral life is maintained and transformed." But an ideal is always an ideal, even though it may be a very little one; and "man's Type, as developed 'up to date,'" so far as we have material for describing it, contains the "achieved results" of evil as well as good in ancestral conduct, and the tendencies which these have left behind them. What is wanted, and what is not given, is a criterion for distinguishing amongst these between the good and the evil. This is the criticism which I have urged against the "Darwinian moralists."

<sup>1</sup> Simcox, *Natural Law*, p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

be,' and for certifying that the 'few chosen specimens' have realised this state in its perfect form. Thus "conformity to the type as it is going to be," equally with "perfection of [conformity to] the type as it is," seems to be but another way of saying "abundance and variety of vital power," or, more fully stated, "the possession of abundant faculties, active and passive, fully developed, and in regular and equal exercise."<sup>1</sup> The question thus comes to be how we are to determine this 'abundance of faculties.' We cannot do so by reference to such characteristics as increase in the number and complexity of these faculties; for a criterion of this kind, as we have seen, is of no assistance in deciding the most fundamental ethical questions. To say that these faculties must be 'regular and equal' in their exercise, is to give a merely formal canon. For how the equality and regularity are to be brought about,—which faculties are to be supreme and which subordinate—what meaning equality can have in view of the admitted diversity in a man's nature,—are questions left altogether undetermined. And to describe the ideal or perfect universe as one in which there is no conflict or collision,<sup>2</sup> is to give a description which is negative as well as merely

<sup>1</sup> Simcox, *Natural Law*, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> "Of real tendencies"—*Natural Law*, p. 98. But what tendencies are not real?

which falls  
back on the  
subjective  
standard.

formal, and which is void of application to actual conditions. We are thus obliged to fall back on a subjective criterion, and say that the abundant life which it is the end of conduct to promote is a man's strongest tendencies, or the greatest number of these. Natural good is determined by "preferring<sup>1</sup> out of all the rudimentary possibilities existing in nature, the combination that harmonises the greatest number of the strongest tendencies."<sup>1</sup> We set out, be it remembered, to obtain a characterisation of those acts to which the most persistent tendencies of human nature lead us; and the conclusion we have arrived at is, that they are the acts which harmonise the greatest number of the strongest tendencies. The objective standard is thus reduced to the subjective standard, which it was brought in to explain and support.

Strongest  
tendencies  
the result  
of past  
activities,

Now these strongest tendencies, in the harmonious play of which natural good or perfection is said to consist, are themselves the result of the courses of conduct which have been most vigorous and successful in ancestral organisms, and they may therefore, perhaps, be taken as a survival and index of the antecedent state of human nature. So far as the theory of evolution is able to reach any ideal for conduct, that ideal would seem to be simply the realisation—or, rather, continuation—of human nature as it has been and is,—with this formal

<sup>1</sup> Natural Law, p. 98.



modification, that, while the various impulses are, so far as possible, to have free play given them, they should be developed in a harmonious manner. It seems doubtful, however, how far this tendency towards harmony is properly suggested by, or consistent with, evolution, which has implied a ceaseless struggle of opposing forces. At any rate, evolution does not seem competent to give any sufficient principle of relative subordination between the various impulses, such as might add reality to the formal principle of harmony. But what it is essential to lay stress on here is, that the only ideal which empirical evolution tends to set up is conformity to human nature as it is, or to the tendencies in it which are strongest and most persistent.

We thus see that the attempt to explain on empirical grounds what is meant by positing 'life,' or 'increase and variety of life,' as the ideal or the standard for action, is practically reduced to making the most persistent impulses of human nature the guide of conduct. But these impulses, it has been shown, are only the survival or remnant of past stages in the course of development, not anticipations of future stages: so that evolution<sup>1</sup> is in this way incapable of providing an ideal of progress <sup>and thus give no ideal for progress.</sup> as the end for conduct, and the last word it seems able to give us as a guide for action is that we should tread in the places where the foot-

prints of ancestral conduct have left the deepest impress. The ideal of such a system is summed up in a new Beatitude, "Blessed is he that continueth where he is." It is probably just because the empirical aspect of evolution seems so little able to yield an end for human conduct corresponding to the actual course of evolution—which has been progress—that the attempts made to develop a system of morals from the principle just reached are so unsatisfactory. It is true that systems have been worked out by moralists who have taken human nature as their standard, and that Trendelenburg, at any rate, expressly includes historical development in his conception of man. But both Trendelenburg and a moralist like Butler (who has as yet no conception of the gradual modifications of human character and tendencies produced by evolution) have a view of human nature essentially distinct from that which has been called the 'naturalistic' view.<sup>1</sup> For both assume a definite rational organisation of impulses similar to that taught in Plato's analogy between the individual man and a political constitution, so that the whole nature, or human nature as

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Trendelenburg, *Naturrecht*, p. 45: "Von der philosophischen Seite kann es kein anderes Princip der Ethik geben als das menschliche Wesen an sich, d. h., das menschliche Wesen in der Tiefe seiner Idee und im Reichthum seiner historischen Entwicklung. Beides gehört zusammen. Denn das nur Historische würde blind und das nur Ideale leer."

a whole, cannot be identified with the impulses which strength at any time makes most persistent, but depends upon the rational allotment of function and measure to each.

In summing up the argument of the preceding chapters, it is necessary to refer again to the discussion carried on in chapter vii. on the relation between egoism and altruism as affected by the theory of evolution. This discussion was not inserted in order to throw an additional obstacle in the way of obtaining an ethical standard from the empirical theory of evolution. It is an integral part of an attempt to estimate the ethical value of the evolution-theory. The theory of evolution certainly seems to go a long way towards establishing the unity of the individual with the race, and towards substituting an organic relation between them, in place of the almost contingent reciprocal relations spoken of in earlier empirical theories. But, when we come to enquire into the nature of this organic unity, attempting still to keep to the purely empirical point of view, we find that the old difficulties return, that it must be recognised that the connexion is empirically incomplete, and that it breaks down at the very places where a firm basis for the theory of morals is required. It was in this way that, quite apart from this opposition between the individual and the whole, the empirical char-

Summary.

Difficulty of  
reconciling  
individual  
and social  
ends

acter of the theory prevented our getting from it any clear and consistent notion of the ethical end to which it leads.

Hedonistic  
interpreta-  
tion of evol-  
ution not  
possible.

It appeared at first that the ethics of evolution, when interpreted empirically, might be easily reconciled with the older theory of hedonism, by identifying life with pleasure—holding that the highest or most evolved life is that which contains most pleasure, and that increase of pleasure may therefore be taken as the end of conduct. In this way the end of evolutionism would be reduced to the end of utilitarianism. Some utilitarians, on the other hand, sought to get rid of the difficulties of their calculus, by the assumption that the greatest pleasure would be found by following the direction of evolution. But, around both points of view, and the correspondence they assumed to exist between pleasure and evolution, special difficulties were seen to gather. Any hedonistic theory might be met by the assertion that life is essentially a painful experience, and pleasure unattainable; and, although the grounds on which this assertion was made seemed to be distinctly erroneous, and hedonism did not appear to be an impossible theory of conduct, yet a similar objection told with greater force against the combination of evolutionism and hedonism. For it holds the double position that the end is to promote life, and that life is to be promoted by adding to pleasure; or else, that the end is pleasure,

but that pleasure is to be got by following evolution. It postulates, therefore, that the progress of life tends, and tends even in a proportionate degree, to the increase of pleasure. Yet we could obtain no proof that this progress does, as a matter of fact, increase pleasure in any regular way. On the contrary, the facts of experience seemed to show that life and pleasure do not advance proportionately, nor even always concomitantly. But a still more important and fundamental objection to the hedonistic form of evolutionism was inferred from the nature of pleasure itself; for it can be modified indefinitely, and always follows in the wake of function. Thus the sole intelligible account we can give of what conduct will bring the greatest pleasure is, that it is the conduct which calls forth the greatest amount of successful energising, that which employs the greatest number and the strongest of the human faculties. Hence, instead of being able to measure life by pleasure, we were driven to interpret pleasure in terms of life.

At first sight it seemed as if the theory of evolution might lead us beyond the pleasure-basis of older Naturalism. But, when the matter was examined more closely, it was found that the notions put forward were unsatisfactory, that they did not represent the progressive nature of the course of evolution, and that their apparent force fell away before logical analysis. It became evi-

No independent ethical ideal given by the theory of evolution.

dent, in the first place, that no appropriate standard for human conduct could be derived from the nature of evolution in general. It is true that adaptation to environment is necessary for life ; but to put forward such adaptation as the moral standard, is to set up a practical goal which corresponds but ill with the facts from which it professes to be taken, making the theory which is supposed to account for progress establish no end by pursuit of which progress becomes possible for human action. Further than this, it neglects a factor in evolution as necessary to it as is adaptation to environment—the element, namely, of variation. A theory which took the latter as well as the former of these factors into account seemed, in the next place, to be given by those general characteristics which are said to mark all progress—*increase of definiteness, coherence, and heterogeneity*. But from these, again, it was found impossible to elicit a coherent and consistent rule for determining right and wrong in conduct, or a definite end for action : they were too abstract and mechanical to suit the living organism of human conduct ; and we were thus driven back on the more general statement that ‘*life*’ or the ‘*increase of life*’ is the end after which we should strive. In enquiring into the meaning which could be given to this end, without interpreting it as pleasure, it was found, after tracing it through various forms of expression, that

it reduced itself to making a man's strongest and most persistent impulses both standard and end. And this proved to be not only an uncertain and shifting guide for conduct, but an imperfect representation of what was to be expected from a progressive, because evolutionist, theory. For these persistent impulses could only be regarded as the survival of past activities, and consequently, contained no ideal beyond that of continuing in the old paths, and re-treading an already well-beaten course. Just as from the external end of adaptation to environment, so from this internal or subjective principle, no ideal for progress, nor any definite standard for action, could be obtained.

It would appear, therefore, that the theory of evolution—however great its achievements in the realm of natural science—is almost resultless in ethics. It has started with a fundamental ethical assumption, the grounds of which have not been examined, and which has, indeed, been seldom recognised; and as a consequence, in spite of the light which it throws on many practical questions, it has been found unable either to set up a comprehensive ideal for life, or to yield any principle for distinguishing between good and evil in conduct.

## CHAPTER X.

## CONCLUSION.

1. Summary  
of the rela-  
tion of  
evolution to  
ethics.

THE preceding chapters have passed in review the various ways in which ethical results may seem to follow from the theory of evolution. The enquiry has been complicated—to a large extent, it has been caused—by a double ambiguity. There are two quite different sets of questions to which the name ‘ethical’ is commonly applied: and ‘evolution’ differs in nature according to the factors which it involves. A reference once more to these points may serve the purpose of gathering together the main lines of argument and enforcing the conclusion arrived at.

Two dis-  
tinct kinds  
of ethical  
enquiry :

The enquiries commonly described as ‘ethical’ comprise two kinds of question, which differ fundamentally from one another in scope, and require the employment of distinct methods for their solution. On the one hand there are the facts of human conduct, the customs and institutions to which it gives rise, and the sentiments and ideas by which it is accompanied. All these are



facts in time whose genesis and history may be investigated by appropriate historical methods. On the other hand, there is a question of different scope which no amount of history can solve. This is the question of the value or worth of conduct and the truth of the judgments which men pass upon it. The question is no longer how the action came to be performed or the judgments passed upon it arose, but whether the action was right, and whether our moral judgments are true judgments.

The former class of questions, it is clear, are concerned with matters of fact and history. Their investigation, it has also been allowed, must be guided by the conception of evolution. But, even here, an important distinction is often overlooked. Evolution is a somewhat vague conception. It may mean nothing more than an assertion of historical continuity; and, in this sense, it is true that moral conduct institutions and ideas have been evolved. But the term may also have the more defined meaning which owes its prominence in contemporary thought to Darwin's researches into organic development. In this meaning of the term evolution is defined by its method: it works by natural selection, that is, by the death of those organisms which are unable to maintain themselves in the struggle for life. It postulates individual variety such that one organism is more efficient than another in the struggle, and an environment

(v) The evolution of moral ideas and institutions.

Evolution as an expression for historical continuity.

Evolution by natural selection.

so constituted as to be incapable of supporting all the individual organisms which are produced.

Limits to  
the applica-  
bility of  
natural  
selection.

In this definite meaning of the term, evolution does not and cannot apply to more than a portion of the whole realm of fact and history. The conditions which it implies are clearly absent in the region of the inorganic. The whole course of cosmic evolution is outside the influence of 'evolution' in the Darwinian sense of the term, until we reach the comparatively recent and comparatively restricted domain of life. Natural selection is not the only method of evolution: it could not operate until late in the world's history; it can never effect more than a small portion of the facts in the ceaseless process of existence.

The question thus suggests itself, Whether the special method of evolution, which operates and can operate only at a certain stage of evolution, may not have a further as well as an earlier limit. When once this question is fairly put, the answer to it hardly seems doubtful. It is difficult to trace the first emergence of natural selection in the cosmic process; but natural selection is nevertheless a force qualitatively distinct from anything that can influence merely inorganic development. It is almost equally difficult to identify the first appearances of intelligent volition; and yet it is a new factor in development qualitatively distinct from natural selection. Foresight is an essential characteristic

of intelligent volition; and foresight is absent from natural selection. Human activity involves an ideal factor of which there are only anticipations in animal activity.

The prominence of biological study in contemporary thought, and the far-reaching importance of its results, especially the discovery and formulation of the principle of natural selection, have tended to the exaggeration of the effects of that force and to the neglect of other factors in human development. Yet these other factors may claim to be of greater importance than natural selection in determining the conduct and social institutions of man.

The 'struggle for existence,' which was suggested to Darwin by Malthus's work, and which he had mainly — although not entirely — in view, was a struggle between individuals for food and mates. But, especially in the higher stages of life, the competitions carried on are not merely between individuals and not merely for means of livelihood. There is, as Darwin saw, a conflict between groups as well as a conflict between individuals; and there is also what has been called a conflict between ideas as well as a conflict between groups.

Different modes of competition in human development:

A brief consideration of this last form of competition may serve to illustrate the argument.<sup>1</sup> (α) the conflict of ideas;

<sup>1</sup> The following passages marked as quotations are taken (with slight modifications) from the author's 'Recent Tendencies in Ethics' (1904), pp. 54 ff.

"The various institutions in our national life may be said to be forms which have to maintain themselves, often in competition with other and antagonistic forms of institution. The same holds of our various ideas or general conceptions, whether about morality or about matters more purely intellectual. For instance, forty or fifty years ago, there was a fierce controversy amongst biologists between the group of ideas represented by Darwin's theory and the group of ideas represented by the traditional view of the fixity of species; and from this conflict the Darwinian group of ideas has emerged victorious. Now, when the phrase 'natural selection in morals' is used, the reference is commonly to a conflict of this kind. The suggestion is that different ideas and also different standards of action are manifested at the same time in the same community, that they compete with one another for existence, and that those which are better adapted to the life of the community survive, while the others grow weaker and in the end disappear. In this way the law of natural selection is supposed to apply to moral ideas and moral standards, and also to intellectual standards, and to the institutions and customs in which our ideas are expressed."

But in this supposition an analogy is confused with an identity.<sup>1</sup> The mode of operation involves

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 165.

foresight and purpose in the one case and not in the other. In the great majority of instances the holding of false or inadequate conceptions does not tend to weaken vitality in the way that would be necessary to give natural selection a chance of operating by cutting off the organisms which are unfit to maintain themselves. "Intelligent selection is not restricted to the negative method by which alone natural selection works; and its operation, positive as well as negative, was certainly well known long before Darwin's day. Starting with the familiar facts of artificial or purposive selection, Darwin showed how results similar to those aimed at and reached in this way might be brought about by the operation of certain natural laws, working without purpose or design. Purposive selection pursues its ends more directly and in general attains them far more quickly than does natural selection. A still more striking characteristic is the fact that it does not entail the waste and pain which mark the course of natural selection. Witness the records of natural selection in the vegetable and animal kingdoms, where thousands are called into fruitless being that a few may survive and prosper. Wastefulness is the most striking feature of its method, and its path is strewn with wreckage. In all these respects the conflict of ideas belongs to the level of purposive and not to that of natural selection.

It involves consciousness of the end, which natural selection never does; it is comparatively rapid in reaching its goal and comparatively direct in the route it takes; and the victory of an idea does not take effect through any general extermination of the individuals who cherish ideas 'unfit' for survival. It is true that human development has not ceased to be affected by natural selection; but that process is always clumsy and slow and wasteful; and the purposive intelligent selection which gradually supersedes it is one of the greatest possible gains to living beings: its presence distinguishes men from animals; its predominance distinguishes civilised men from savages; the higher the stage of civilisation, the more marked is the development of selective intelligence. And in the conflict of ideas, whether moral or intellectual, the issue is determined by a selection which is predominately purposive, and only in the slightest degree natural."

( $\beta$ ) the conflict of groups;

To a large extent it is the same with the conflict of groups. The social qualities of sympathy, order, obedience, and the like, have not arisen by mere haphazard, and have not been favoured by natural selection alone. "All through civilised life, and probably throughout a great part of savage life, there is the keenest enquiry into and perception of the qualities which will make for success. These qualities are carefully selected and positively fos-

tered. Armies are drilled—the power of endurance and the habit of discipline are cultivated—in order that victory may be gained. Intelligent foresight, not natural selection, is the agent at work. The issue may resemble the result of natural selection, for it leads to conflict and defeat of the unfit; but the conqueror is he who has foreseen the conditions of the struggle, has deliberately equipped his forces for the fight, and been the intelligent organiser of victory.

“And in the case of competition between individuals, it is clear that natural selection is very far from being the only factor. A man is trained or trains himself for a profession. It does not just somehow happen that a number of people develop certain varieties of occupation, and that natural selection makes play with the result, cutting off the unfit and leaving only those who are fairly well adapted to their positions. One adapts oneself carefully and of set purpose to the conditions of one's life, instead of simply waiting for natural selection to cut one off should one happen to be unfit. (γ) the conflict of individuals.

“Even among animals there are certain processes which cannot be brought under natural selection. Beginnings of subjective selection in animal life. There are the first efforts, slight as they may be, towards learning by experience. There are also all those facts which Darwin classes under sexual selection, where there is a positive choosing, due no

doubt not to intelligent purpose but nevertheless to subjective impulse. This marks the beginning of the end of the reign of natural selection, because in it to the purely objective or external factor there is added an internal or subjective factor; along with the process of cutting off unsuitable individuals among chance varieties there appears the process of selecting that variety which pleases or attracts."

It must be borne in mind that, in strictness, 'natural selection' is not selection at all: it is only a negative, not a positive, process. The positive tendency comes from another source altogether, from a tendency within the organism. On the lower levels of life its chief manifestation is the unexplained tendency to variation. In man the force is reflective and rational: ends are anticipated in idea and deliberately pursued; and, in so far as the activity is wisely directed, the negative process of selection called 'natural' is displaced by a positive selection which is intelligent. The course of human development is altogether misinterpreted if we overlook either the operation of subjective selection on the part of the individual who strives to accomplish his end, or the organised operation of the same force as it is exhibited in social selection. To the latter natural selection bears some analogy in the results it produces; but they are fundamentally distinct in their nature and mode of working.



Evolution works in many ways, and natural selection is neither its first nor its final method. So far, therefore, as we are concerned with the questions of fact and history commonly classed as ethical—that is to say, with the nature and growth of moral institutions and moral ideas—the assertion of moral development does not imply that the process of evolution has been determined by the same method as that which rules in biology, any more than it implies that it has been determined by the same method as that which rules astronomical or cosmical changes. The course of moral development may begin at a period when natural selection is in the ascendant, but it rises out of it to a higher stage in which the influence of natural selection wanes and reason dominates the process. The facts of the moral life—whether they are of the nature of social institution or whether they belong to the inner world of ideas—cannot be explained by natural selection alone. To understand them we must recognise the obvious facts of foresight and purpose. Their evolution is not entirely nor even mainly naturalistic: it involves a spiritual factor which is manifested clearly in the history of man, and which is as distinct from natural selection as natural selection is distinct from the mechanical causes to which inorganic changes are referred. The method of evolution begins with mechanism, is changed when life appears, and changed again

Influence of  
ideas on  
moral devel-  
opment.

when life becomes self-conscious and can look before and after. At each of these stages the appearance of a new factor can be observed, and this new factor affects the result and modifies the method of the process. It is characteristic of naturalism to attempt an interpretation of the whole process in terms of those factors only which appear at the earlier stages. The theory has the advantage of simplicity; but the simplicity is gained at the expense of the facts.

(b) The strictly ethical question : that of the meaning and standard of goodness :

So far the argument has been concerned only with the development of moral institutions and ideas as facts which enter into human life. The question has been purely one of history and fact. But another question remains of deeper ethical import. Even if natural selection could do everything ever claimed for it in the former regard, it would still only exhibit an historical process, showing how moral feelings, ideas, and customs have assumed their present form. But that is not the question before us when we ask how good is distinguished from evil, or what the worth of things or conduct is, or how the ideal of life or ethical end is to be conceived. The question thus expressed in different forms implies a new point of view, and no amount of history can answer it. It is an irrelevant answer to the question 'What is good?' when we are given a mere record of men's ideas about what is

the facts of evolution irrelevant as an answer to this question.

good and of the way in which these opinions arose. We ask about the validity of moral judgments, and are put off by speculations concerning their history. The strictly ethical question is thus ignored.

Yet it is not too much to say that evolutionist ethics owes its simplicity and attractiveness to its evasion of the fundamental problem or to its confusion of that problem with a question of history. It constantly tends to make an account of the way in which things have come to pass do duty for an answer to the question, What is good? Were its history as sound as we have seen it to be doubtful and arbitrary, it would not really touch the question at issue. Attention has already been drawn to this distinction, the neglect of which has made possible the implied assumption of evolutionist ethics.<sup>1</sup> But it may be well to refer to it once more, lest it should be obscured by the details of the criticism worked out in the preceding chapters.

The problems of history and validity confused in evolutionist ethics :

A description of the facts and laws of development, however complete, could never of itself yield any ethical precept. However fully he understood the course of things, a man might be without the knowledge of good and evil required to direct his action, and the evolutionist would be unable to give him a reason why he should adopt as maxims of conduct the laws seen to operate in nature.

The idea which ascribes moral guidance to the

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 142 f., 145 f., 185, 244, 283.

two different  
meanings of  
'end';

laws of nature may result from a view of nature as having a fundamental ethical or spiritual import, perhaps in virtue of its divine origin. But this way of looking at things cannot be reconciled with Naturalism. And, in the minds of the naturalists, the idea is more likely to be the result of a confusion due to the different meanings of the concept 'end.' It would seem to be thought that, in pointing out the drift or tendency of things, we are, at the same time, prescribing the end towards which human endeavour ought to be directed. Now, it is very difficult to say how far tendencies of this kind can be anticipated. The circumstances which condition historical events are so complicated that it is by no means easy to predict the result of their combination. It has been urged, indeed, by Schäffle<sup>1</sup> that we are at least able to see as far as the next stage of historical progress; and this is thought to lead to the conclusion that we should make this stage of development our end: further than it we cannot see, and therefore need not provide. According to this view, if without an ultimate end for conduct, we should yet have a proximate end. Instead of saying that we should take no thought for the morrow, the contention would seem to be that we should live for to-morrow but take no thought for the day after.

But here the change in point of view is scarcely

<sup>1</sup> *Bau und Leben des socialen Körpers*, ii. 68.

concealed. From the discussion of efficient causes we proceed directly to prescribe an end for conduct. We have shown (let it be granted) that the forces now in operation will modify the present state of affairs in a certain known manner. To-day we are in state A; to-morrow we shall be in, or well on the way towards, state Ab; therefore, runs the conclusion, implied or expressed, we ought to make Ab our end. Here we have, at its plainest, the fallacy due to the confusion of two different meanings of 'end.' The tendency or 'end' of evolution, as it was gathered or inferred from the facts, was not, in the first instance, credited with any ethical import; and yet it is made to convey a moral obligation.

Nor is this the only confusion in what seems to be the fundamental thought of evolutionist ethics. Conclusion and premiss hang loosely together, if they are not altogether inconsistent. For, if Ab is really the next stage of development, our making it our end can neither help nor hinder its realisation. If, on the other hand, there is really a meaning in our making the world-end our own, then we cannot say with confidence that it is the next stage in the course of events, since its realisation is not merely in the future, but is also dependent upon our volition. Two things are constantly confused in discussions of this kind: the course of evolution as it would be apart from my volition and that of

evolution  
apart from  
human vol-  
ition, and  
evolution as  
a whole.

other men ; and the course of evolution as a whole, inclusive of the effects of human volition. If the latter is referred to when it is said that we should make the tendency of evolution our conscious end, the statement is without importance ; for how could we act otherwise than in the way in which it has been foreseen that we will act ? If the former meaning of the course of evolution is intended, the assertion is unreasonable, for why should we simply do that which would happen without our action ?

In intelligent action (and all moral action involves intelligence) the idea does not work itself out in the same way as an efficient cause works in the processes of nature. The idea as a mental fact is a force which tends both to persist in consciousness and to realise itself through the motor energies. The idea or consciousness of an end is thus a motive to action. The final cause becomes also an efficient cause. But the two notions are not convertible. The idea of an end, being conceived by reason, cannot be described simply as a tendency become conscious. It has passed into the region in which various conceptions are, or may be, competing with one another ; and the result depends upon voluntary decision. However the laws of this voluntary decision may be expressed, they cannot be identified with the natural sequence of events as it may be conceived to exist independently of the indi-

vidual consciousness. What seems the tendency of things may be altered or modified upon some ground of preference by the conscious subject.

The difficulties involved in its preliminary assumption may perhaps have something to do with the constant tendency of evolutionist ethics to revert to hedonism. Enough has already been said of the impossibility of showing that evolution constantly tends to increased pleasure. It may be thought, however, that, if neither optimism nor pessimism can be established, the modified doctrine of what is called Meliorism may be accepted. And this theory—according to which the world is improving, and the balance of pleasure over pain is on the increase—might seem to form a convenient refuge. For it may appear to follow from it that, if the next stage in the world-process—that towards which evolution is tending—is known, then we should make it our end to accelerate this stage, as it will bring with it a better state of affairs than the present. But not even the most enthusiastic meliorist has ever tried to show anything more than that his doctrine holds true in general, and that, although there are many receding waves, the tide of human happiness is rising. Unfortunately we cannot tell how great these receding waves may be; we cannot always be sure when they surround us: we may be swimming with them when it would be better for human

Tendency of  
evolutionist  
ethics to  
revert to  
hedonism.

happiness if we battled against them. In judging of any special and temporary movement of events (and it is not pretended that our foresight can extend far into the future) we cannot assume that the second stage will be better than the first, or that voluntary modification of it—should that be possible—might not improve both the immediate result and its later consequences. Much the same must be said if we attempt to interpret evolution by falling back on the conception of 'efficiency' or 'strength,' instead of on that of pleasure. We cannot be sure that the forces strongest at any given period and place are the forces destined ultimately to prevail; and we may find ourselves co-operating with tendencies which a larger view would have taught us to resist.

The strictly  
ethical  
question  
untouched  
by evolu-  
tion.

The further we go in examining any naturalistic theory of ethics, the clearer does it become that it can make no nearer approach to a solution of the ethical question than to point out what courses of action are likely to be the pleasantest, or what tendencies to action the strongest; and this it can only do within very narrow limits both of time and accuracy. As to what things are good it can say nothing without a previous assumption identifying good with some such notion as pleasant or powerful. The doctrine of evolution itself, which has given new vogue to Naturalism both in morality and in philosophy generally, only widens our view



of the old landscape. By its aid we cannot pass from 'is' to 'ought,' or from efficient to final cause, any more than we can get beyond the realm of space by means of the microscope or the telescope.

Thus we return to the criticism. The theory of evolution becomes ethical only by changing its point of view from that of history to that of validity, and by ignoring the fact that a change has been made. To further evolution has been called a 'new duty';<sup>1</sup> but no ground is given for the assertion that it is a duty. Or the ethical imperative is laid down "be a self-conscious agent in the evolution of the universe";<sup>2</sup> but again no attempt is made to show how a statement about the course of nature can be formulated as a rule for conduct. The naturalists seem to be in the same difficulty as Dr Johnson was when Boswell plagued him to give a reason for action: "'Sir,' said he, in an animated tone, 'it is driving on the system of life.'"<sup>3</sup> In their case too, the strength of the answer lies in its 'animated tone.'

The facile doctrine that it is a duty to further evolution received a severe shock from Huxley's vigorous assertion of "the apparent paradox that

<sup>2</sup> The interpretation of evolution.

<sup>1</sup> F. Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty*, p. 337.

<sup>2</sup> A. Barratt, *Mind*, O.S., ii. 172 n.

<sup>3</sup> Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, chap. liv.

Huxley's  
opposition  
of the  
ethical and  
cosmic pro-  
cesses :

ethical nature, while born of cosmic nature, is necessarily at enmity with its parent.”<sup>1</sup> He drew a picture of the cosmic process not as enforcing, nor even as illustrating, morality, but as exhibiting the action and the triumph of forces which it is the business of morality to counteract. “The practice of that which is ethically best,” he said, “what we call goodness or virtue—involves a course of conduct which, in all respects, is opposed to that which leads to success in the cosmic struggle for existence. . . . The ethical progress of society depends, not on imitating the cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in combating it.”<sup>2</sup>

This inversion of evolutionist ethics is more salutary as well as more reasonable than the doctrine against which it was directed, though its contrasts are, perhaps, too sharply drawn. Huxley was compelled by his general theory to look upon morality as having arisen out of the very process which it sets itself to oppose. To use his own metaphor, it kicks down the ladder by which it climbed. The two orders are thus strangely related to one another. “The cosmic order has nothing to say to the moral order, except that, somehow or other, it has given it birth; the moral order has nothing to say to the cosmic order, except that it is

<sup>1</sup> *Evolution and Ethics*, preface, p. viii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 83.

certainly bad.”<sup>1</sup> But the contrast which Huxley draws is not between the course of evolution as a whole and the ethical process. Man, or at least civilised man, is excluded from his survey of nature when he characterises the methods of its development. The opposition is between natural selection and the conduct which is moral and intelligent. But if the latter, as he also holds, is a product of the former, its characteristics too must be taken into account in order to understand the cosmic process as a whole.

The true inference to be drawn from his argument is not that there is a conflict between ‘ethics’ and ‘evolution.’ The conflict is rather between one stage of evolution and another: between the natural selection which determines animal development and the rational principles and ethical sentiments and ideas which in some degree—and, it may be hoped, in an increasing degree—determine human conduct. These ethical motives have to win their way by conflict—by struggle with other and non-ethical forces which were appropriate to a lower stage of development, and which yield only gradually to ethical influence. The power of the new motives is strengthened by the conflict; and, as he carries out his ideas to a successful issue, by methods which mere ‘nature’ did not prescribe, man comes to con-

the opposition really between two stages of evolution.

<sup>1</sup> Recent Tendencies in Ethics, p. 47.

template himself as having a calling and destiny beyond the physical process from which he has emerged, and as the servant of ideals which that process did not bestow.

Inadequacy  
of the  
naturalistic  
interpreta-  
tion of  
evolution.

The significance of evolution is not adequately understood when we arbitrarily restrict attention to the method of natural selection. This, indeed, is one way of interpreting evolution—the way which has been more or less consistently maintained by Naturalism. The ethical consequences of this method have been discussed in the preceding chapters, and it has been shown that, in strictness, they come to nothing. Its more general philosophical consequence may be said to have been the tendency to regard the physical or external process as the only efficient reality, and to treat consciousness as simply an ‘epiphenomenon’—the result, in some unexplained way, of a certain stage of nervous organisation, and yet itself without influence upon the course of events. A discussion of this theory does not come within the scope of the present work. But it may be said that it is hardly possible to state it without contradiction: for, in regarding mind as an effect but not a cause, the theory conflicts with its own postulate of the conservation of energy.

The naturalistic interpretation is not the only possible interpretation of evolution. Its claim to “interpret the more developed by the less de-

veloped"<sup>1</sup> is too often made to serve as an excuse for overlooking or depreciating the characteristics of the more developed stages. And, so far as these have features which distinguish them from the less advanced, and cannot be resolved into them, the process as a whole is left unexplained. For an adequate view it is often necessary to interpret the less advanced by the more advanced. Consciousness cannot be explained by the unconscious, nor can life be interpreted by describing its physical equivalents. The psychologist would be able to say nothing about the mental processes of animals unless he could draw upon his knowledge of his own mind; and the whole literature of biology, after Darwin as well as before him, would require to be rewritten, were the conception of purpose excluded.

The character of the course of evolution is seen in a different light when it is recognised that human conduct and its methods must be taken into account in interpreting the process. The scientific writers who have been most forward in pressing the claim that man must be held to be a part of the cosmic process have also, unfortunately, been inclined to interpret the whole process, not as it is, but as it would be apart from human intervention and the ideals which man brings to bear upon it. But the claim that man must be interpreted as part of the

Possibility  
of an inter-  
pretation on  
the basis of  
idealism.

<sup>1</sup> Spencer, Principles of Ethics, i. 7.

universe involves the counterclaim that the nature of the universe cannot be understood apart from the distinctive features of man's activity. And, when this is allowed, the naturalistic interpretation of evolution becomes increasingly difficult. Evolution can no longer be regarded as entirely purposeless, for that part of it which we call human conduct undoubtedly displays purpose. It cannot be entirely indifferent or antagonistic to morality, for the action of men, which enters into the process, bears the impress of moral ideas.

These considerations are not put forward as proving the truth of the view that the process of evolution is the expression of a divine purpose. They prove only that purpose and intelligence are somewhere within the process, not that they are present everywhere, or that the whole course of nature is the expression of one increasing purpose. But the facts leave room for this interpretation, if they do not demonstrate it.

Its justification would require the establishment of a view of the world which may be called idealist, seeing that it would explain reality as depending upon and expressing mind. No such justification can be attempted here. But it may not be out of place to remark that it enables us to avoid both the fruitless efforts of the naturalists to derive an ethical doctrine from the history of development, and the antagonistic view urged by Huxley that

the cosmic and moral orders are in hopeless conflict. It avoids the latter view, because it regards the moral ideas and institutions of man as part of the complete process, as factors in the movement which leads in time from nature to spirit. And it avoids the former view because it holds that the ethical element which is manifested latest in the temporal process, is presupposed from the first and necessary to the understanding of the whole. The ideal of goodness may contribute towards the interpretation of evolution, but its own explanation must be sought by another method.

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